

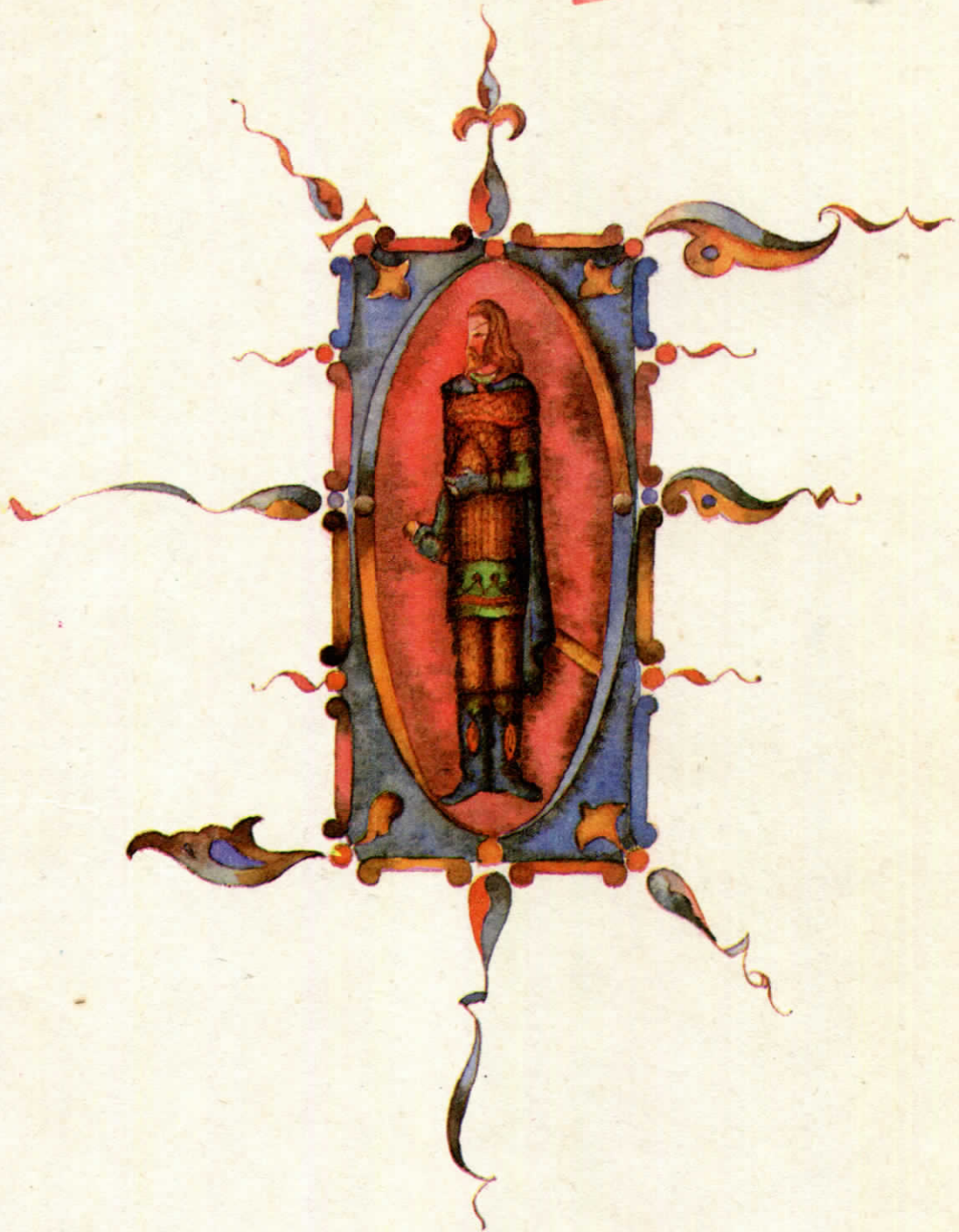
Alexander Pushkin  
Ruslan and Ludmila



















Raduga Publishers  
Moscow









Alexander Pushkin

Ruslan  
and  
Ludmila



A Poem

Translated from the Russian by  
*Irina Zheleznova*



Raduga Publishers  
Moscow



Designed by *Mikhail Trubetskoi*

Illustrations by *Nikolai Dobritsyn*

**А. ПУШКИН**

**Руслан и Людмила**

*На английском языке*

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# RUSLAN AND LUDMILA

## DEDICATION

For you, queens of my soul, my treasured  
Young beauties, for your sake did I  
Devote my golden hours of leisure  
To writing down, I'll not deny,  
With faithful hand of long past ages  
The whispered fables.... Take them, pray,  
Accept these playful lines, these pages  
For which I ask no praise.... But stay!  
For my reward—I need not seek it—  
Is hope: Oh, that some girl should scan,  
As only one who's lovesick can,  
These naughty songs of mine in secret!







## PROLOGUE

On seashore far a green oak towers,  
And to it with a gold chain bound,  
A learned cat whiles away the hours  
By walking slowly round and round.  
To right he walks, and sings a ditty;  
To left he walks, and tells a tale....

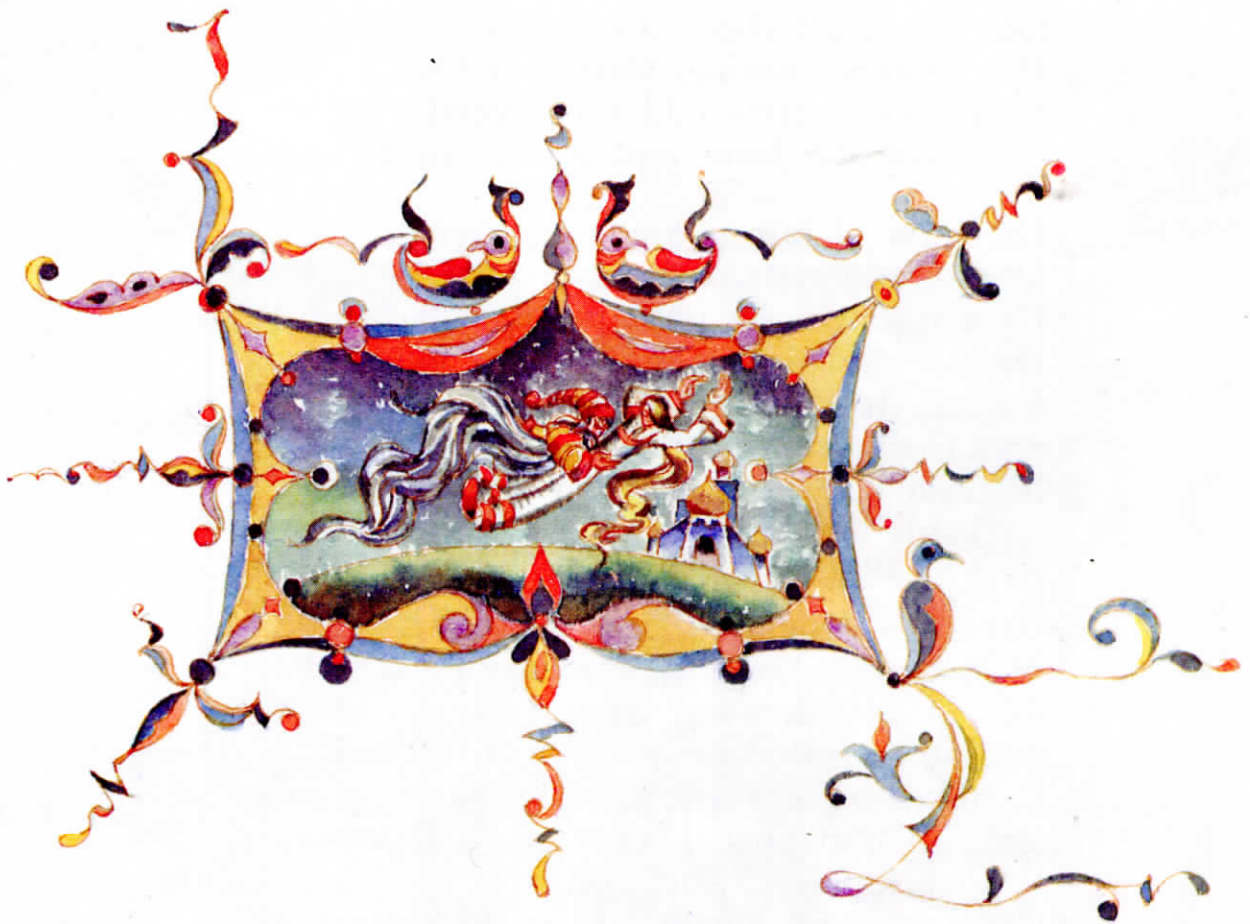
What marvels there! A mermaid sitting  
High in a tree, a sprite, a trail  
Where unknown beasts move never seen by  
Man's eyes, a hut on chicken feet,  
Without a door, without a window,  
An evil witch's lone retreat;  
The woods and valleys there are teeming  
With strange things.... Dawn brings waves  
that, gleaming,

Over the sandy beaches creep,  
And from the clear and shining water  
Step thirty goodly knights escorted  
By their Old Guardian, of the deep  
An ancient dweller.... There a dreaded  
And hated tsar is captive ta'en;  
There, as all watch, for cloud banks headed,  
Across the sea and o'er a plain,  
A warlock bears a knight. There, weeping,  
A princess sits locked in a cell,  
And Grey Wolf serves her very well;  
There, in a mortar, onward sweeping  
All of itself, beneath the skies  
The wicked Baba-Yaga flies;  
There pines Koshchei and lusts for gold....

All breathes of Russ, the Russ of old!  
There once was I, friends, and the cat,  
As near him 'neath the oak I sat  
And drank of sweet mead at my leisure,  
Recounted tales to me.... With pleasure  
One that I liked do I recall  
And here and now will share with all....







## CANTO THE FIRST



The ways and deeds of days gone by,  
A narrative on legend founded....

In princely banquet chamber high,  
By doughty sons and guests surrounded,  
Vladimir-Bright Sun holds a fête;  
His daughter is the chosen mate  
Of Prince Ruslan, and these two linking  
In marriage, old Vladimir's drinking  
Their health, a handsome cup and great  
To his lips held and fond thoughts thinking.  
Our fathers ate 'thout haste—indeed,  
Passed slowly round the groaning tables  
The silver beakers were and ladles  
With frothing ale filled and with mead.

Into the heart cheer poured they, truly....  
The bearers, bowing, solemn-faced,  
Before the feasters tankards placed;  
High rose the foam and hissed, unruly....

The hum of talk is loud, unceasing;  
Abuzz the guests: a merry round.  
Then through the hubbub, all ears pleasing,  
There comes the gusli's rippling sound.  
A hush. In dulcet song and ringing  
Bayan, the bard—all hark him well—  
Of bride and groom the praise is singing;  
He lauds their union, gift of Lel.\*

Ruslan, o'ercome by fiery feeling,  
Of food partakes not; from Ludmila  
He cannot tear away his eyes;  
He flames with love, he frowns, he sighs,  
At his moustache plucks, filled with torment,  
And, all impatience, counts each moment.  
Amid the noisy feasters brood  
Three youthful knights. In doleful mood  
They sit there, their great tankards empty,  
With downcast eyes, the fare, though tempting,  
Untouched; the goblets past them sail;  
They do not seem to hear the tale  
Of wisdom chanted by Bayan....  
The luckless rivals of Ruslan,  
Of love and hate a deadly brew  
In their hearts hid, the three are too  
O'erwrought for speech. The first of these  
Is bold Rogdai of battle fame  
('Twas he who Kiev's boundaries  
Stretched with his blade); the next, the vain,  
Loud-voiced Farlaf, by none defeated  
At festal board, but tame, most tame  
Mid flashing swords and tempers heated;  
The last, the Khazar Khan Ratmir,  
A reckless spirit, aye, and ardent.  
All three are pale-browed, glum, despondent:  
The feast's no feast, the cheer's no cheer.

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\* **Lel—the Slavic god of love.**— *Tr.*







It's over, and the feasters rise  
 And flock together. Noise. All eyes  
 Are smiling, all are on the two  
 Young newly-weds.... Ludmila, tearful,  
 Looks shyly down; her groom is cheerful,  
 He beams.... Now do the shades anew  
 Embrace the earth, e'er nearer creeping,  
 The murk of midnight veils the dome....  
 The boyars, by sweet mead made sleepy,  
 Bow to their hosts and make for home.  
 Ruslan's all rapture, all elation....  
 What bliss! In his imagination  
 His bride caresses he. But there  
 Is sadness in the warmth of feeling  
 With which, their happy union sealing,  
 The old prince blesses our young pair.

The bridal couch has long been ready;  
 The maid is led to it.... It's night.  
 The torches dim, but Lel already  
 His own bright lamp has set alight.  
 Love offers—see—its gifts most tender,  
 Its fondest wish at last comes true.  
 On carpets of Byzantine splendour  
 The jealous covers fall.... Do you  
 The sound of kisses, love's sweet token,  
 And its soft, whispered words not hear?  
 Does not—come, say—the murmur broken  
 Of shy reluctance reach your ear?  
 Anticipation fires the spirit,  
 O'erjoyed the groom.... But lo!—the air  
 Is rent by thunder, ever nearer  
 It comes. A flash! The lamp goes out,  
 The room sways, darkness all about,  
 Smoke pours.... Fear grips Ruslan, defeating  
 His native pluck: his heart stops beating....  
 All's silence, grim and threatening.  
 An eerie voice sounds twice. There rises  
 Up through the haze a menacing  
 Black figure.... Coiling smoke disguises  
 Its shape.... It vanishes.... Now our  
 Poor groom, on his brow drops of sweat,  
 Starts up, by sudden dread beset,







And for his bride—O fateful hour!—  
With trembling hand gropes anxiously....  
On emptiness he seizes, she  
Has by some strange and evil power  
Been borne away.... He's overcome....

Ah, if to be love's martyr some  
Unfortunate young swain is fated,  
His days may well be filled with gloom,  
But life can still be tolerated.  
But if in your arms, after years  
Of longing, of desire, of tears,  
Your bride of but one minute lies  
And then becomes another's prize,  
'Tis much too much... Quite frankly, I,  
Were such my case, would choose to die!

But poor Ruslan's alive and tortured  
In mind and heart.... O'erwhelmed by news,  
Just then arrived, of the misfortune,  
The Prince, enraged, turns on the youth.  
The whole court summoning, "Ludmila....  
Where is Ludmila?" thunders he.  
Ruslan does not respond. "My children!  
Your merits past high hold I.... Free,  
I beg, my daughter from the clutches  
Of evil. I am helpless; such is  
Old age's piteous frailty.  
But though I am too old to do it,  
Not so are you. Go forth and save  
My poor Ludmila, you'll not rue it:  
He who succeeds, shall—writhe, you knave!  
Why did you not, wretch, base tormentor,  
Know how to guard your young wife better?—  
Shall have Ludmila for a bride  
And half my fathers' realm beside!...  
Who'll heed my plea?" "I!" says the grieving,  
Unhappy groom. "I!" shouts Rogdai,  
And echoed by Farlaf his cry  
And by Ratmir is. "We are leaving  
Straightway, and pray believe us, sire,  
We'll ride around the world entire  
If need be. From your daughter parted  
Not long will you be, never fear."



The old prince cannot speak for tears;  
His gratitude is mute; sadhearted,  
A broken man, at door he stands  
And to them stretches out his hands.

All four the palace leave together;  
Ruslan is ashen-faced, half-dead.  
Thoughts of his kidnapped bride, of whether  
He'll ever find the maid, with dread  
And pain his heart fill. Now the foursome  
Get on their restless, chafing horses,  
And leaving dust clouds in their wake,  
Away along the Dnieper make....  
They're lost to sight, but Prince Vladimir  
Stands gazing at the road and tries  
To span the distance ever-dimming  
As after them in thought he flies.



Ruslan, his mind and memory hazy,  
Is mute, lost in a kind of trance;  
Behind him, o'er his shoulder gazing,  
The picture of young arrogance,  
Farlaf rides, hand on hip, defiant.  
Says he: "At last! The taste is sweet  
Of freedom, friends.... When will we meet—  
The prospect likes me well—a giant?  
Then will blood pour as passions seethe  
And victims offer to the sabre.  
Rejoice, my blade! Rejoice, my steed,  
And lightly, freely prance and caper!"

The Khazar Khan, his pulses racing,  
In saddle dances, for in thought  
He is the fair young maid embracing  
Whose love he has for so long sought.  
The light of hope is in his eye,  
Now does he make his stallion fly,  
Now forces him, the good steed teasing,  
To rear, now gallops him uphill,  
Now lets him prance about at will.

Rogdai is silent; with increasing  
Unease his heart fills; dark thoughts chill  
And burden him; he is tormented  
By jealousy, and, all calm gone,  
With hate-glazed eye, like one demented,  
Stares sullenly at Prince Ruslan.

Along a single road the rivals  
Rode on all through the day until  
From east poured shades that night's arrival  
Bespoke.... The Dnieper, cold and still,  
Is wrapt in folds of mist.... The horses  
Have need of rest.... Not far away  
A track lies that another crosses.  
"'Tis time to part," the riders say.  
"Let us chance fate." So 'tis decided;  
Each horse is given now its head,  
And, by the touch of spur unguided,  
Starts off and moves where 'twill ahead.

What do you in the hush of desert  
Alone, Ruslan? Sad is your plight.

Was't all a dream—the bride you treasured,  
The terrors of your wedding night?  
Your helmet pushed down to your brows,  
Your strong hands limp, the reins let loose,  
O'er woods and fields astride your steed  
You ride, while faith and hope recede  
And leave you well-nigh dead of spirit....

A cave shows 'fore the knight; he nears it  
And sees a light there. His feet lead  
Him straight inside. The dark and brooding  
Vaults seem as old as nature. Moody,  
Distraught Ruslan is.... In the cave  
A bearded ancient, his mien grave  
And quiet, sits. A lamp is burning  
Near him, a book lies on his knee;  
Engrossed in it, its pages he  
With careful hand is slowly turning.  
"I bid you welcome, knight! At last!"  
Says he in greeting, smiling warmly.  
"Here have I twenty long years passed  
Of my old age, and grim and lonely  
They've been.... But now has come the day  
For which, foreseeing it, I waited.  
To meet, we two, my son, were fated,  
Now sit and hear me out, I pray....  
Ludmila from you has been taken;  
You flag, you droop, by hope forsaken  
And faith itself.... 'Tis wrong! For brief  
With evil and its partner, grief,  
Will be, I promise, your encounter.  
Take heart; with strong, sound spirit counter  
The blows of fortune, banish woe,  
And, sword aloft held, northward go!

"He who has wronged you, O my daring  
Young stalwart, is old Chernomor.  
A wizard, he is known to carry  
Young maids off to the hills. 'Tis for  
Long years he's reigned there. None has ever  
His castle seen, but through its door  
You'll pass, I know, and end forever  
The villain's rule; by your hand he  
Will perish—so 'tis meant to be!...







I may not yield to indiscretion  
And say aught more; your destiny  
Yourself from this day on you fashion."

Our knight falls at the elder's feet  
And in delight his hand he kisses.  
The world a bright place seems, and sweet  
Life is again; forgot distress is....  
But then the sudden joyful glow  
His face leaves, and it pales and darkens.  
"Do not despair but to me harken,"  
The old man says. "I know what so  
Disquiets you: you are in fear of  
The warlock's love, eh, knight?... Be calm.  
The truth is, O my youthful hero,  
That he can do the maid no harm.  
From sky the stars he'll pluck, I'll wager,  
Or shift the moon that sails on high,  
But change the law of time and aging  
He cannot, hard as he may try.  
Though he lets none her chamber enter  
And jealous watch keeps at her door,  
He is the impotent tormentor  
Of his fair captive, nothing more.  
While never far from her, he curses  
His lot, and soundly—but, my knight,  
'Tis time for you to rest: the earth is  
Enclosed in shadow; it is night."

On soft moss lies Ruslan, a flame  
Before him flickering. He yearns  
For soothing sleep, he twists and turns  
And flings about—but no, 'tis plain  
That sleep won't come. He heaves a sigh  
And says: "Nay, Father, sick am I  
Of soul and cannot sleep for dreary  
And troubled thought. Talk to me, do;  
With godly speech, I beg of you,  
Relieve my heart: it aches, it's weary....  
I make too bold to ask you this;  
You, who befriend me, I importune—  
Speak! Tell me, confidant of fortune:  
Why came you to this wilderness?"



And with a wistful smile replying  
 To him, the 'old man says: "Alas,  
 I have forgot my land!" Then, sighing:  
 "A Finn am I by birth. It was  
 My lot to tend the flocks of neighbours,  
 And I would take them off to graze  
 In vales on which no stranger's gaze  
 E'er rested. Carefree midst my labours  
 Did I remain, and only knew,  
 Besides the woods and streams, what few  
 Joys poverty could offer to me....  
 Alas! Ahead dark days were looming.

"Near where I lived, a lovely flower,  
 One named Nahina, bloomed; of our  
 Young maids none lovelier than she  
 Was there. One morn, a bagpipe blowing,  
 My flocks I grazed where grass was growing  
 In lush profusion. I could see  
 A brook wind 'fore me; by it, weaving  
 A garland, sat a dear young lass....  
 Her beauty—ah, 'twas past believing!—  
 Drew and enchanted me, and as  
 I gazed at her I knew I'd seen her  
 Before.... Yes, knight, it was Nahina,  
 'Twas fate had brought me there. The flame  
 Of love was my reward for eyeing  
 The maid thus brazenly; I came  
 To know a passion self-denying:  
 All of its bliss, all of its pain.

"Six months sped by.... I thought to win her  
 And opened up my heart. I said:  
 'I love thee dearly, sweet Nahina!'  
 But my shy sadness only bred  
 Scorn in her who was vain and prideful;  
 She was indifferent to my lot,  
 And said, of all my pain unmindful:  
 'Well, shepherd mine, I love thee not!'

"I was estranged from all, and gloomy  
 Life seemed. The shady native wood,  
 The games of shepherds—nothing could



My hurt soothe and bring comfort to me....  
 I languished.... But the far seas drew me;  
 To leave my homeland sought I then  
 And with a band of fighting men  
 To brave the ocean's winds capricious....  
 I hoped to win renown and fame  
 And for my own Nahina claim.  
 This planned, according to my wishes,  
 I called upon some boatmen who  
 Joined with me in a quest for danger  
 And gold. My land, to war a stranger,  
 The clash of steel now heard, and knew  
 The sound of boat with boat colliding....  
 On, on we sailed, the billows riding,  
 My men and I, by sweet hope led,  
 Both snow and water painting red  
 For ten long years with gore of foes.  
 As rumour of our prowess spread,  
 The foreign rulers came to dread  
 Our forays, and their champions chose  
 To flee our blades. Yes, fierce and heated  
 Our battles were, and merry, too,  
 And with the men we had defeated  
 Together feasted we. But through  
 The din of war and merrymaking  
 I heard Nahina's voice, and for  
 The sight of her in secret aching,  
 Before me saw my native shore.  
 'Come, men!' I cried. 'Did we not roam  
 The world enough? Time to go home!  
 'Neath native eaves we'll hang our mail;  
 Is't not, in faith, for this we hanker!'

And leaving in our wake a trail  
 Of fear, for Finland we set sail  
 And in her waters soon dropped anchor.

"Fulfilled were all my dreamings past  
 That set my lone heart faster beating.  
 O longed-for moment of our meeting,  
 O blessed hour, you came at last!  
 There, at the feet of my proud beauty,  
 I laid my sword and, too, the booty  
 Of war: pearls, corals, gold. 'Fore her,







By jealous womenfolk surrounded,  
Her one-time playmates, my unbounded  
Love making me her prisoner,  
Mute stood I, but Nahina coolly  
Turned from me, saying with no sign  
That she would e'er relent: 'Nay, truly,  
I do not love thee, hero mine!'

"I do not like to speak of things  
It is pure agony to think of.  
E'en now, my son, when at the brink of  
I am of death, remembrance brings  
Fresh sorrow to my long-numb spirit  
And gravely wounds my being whole,  
And torn by pain, seared by it, wearied,  
I feel the tears down my cheeks roll.

"But hark! In parts I call my home,  
Amid the northern fishers lone,  
The art of magic lives. The shaded,  
Thick-growing forests wrapt in deep,  
Eternal silence lie and keep  
The secrets of the wizards aged  
Who dwell there and whose minds to quest  
For wisdom of the loftiest  
And weirdest kind are given. Awesome  
Their powers are: what was and also  
What will be they have knowledge of,  
Life can they snuff and foster love.

"And I, love's mad and avid seeker,  
In my despair that ne'er grew weaker,  
By means of magic thought to start  
In proud Nahina's icy heart  
Of love for me at least a flicker.  
Toward the murk of woodland free  
My steps in hot impatience turning,  
The subtle craft of wizardry  
I spent unnumbered years in learning.  
Then were the fearsome secrets, sought  
By me with such despair, such yearning,  
Revealed to my enlightened thought;  
Of charms and spells I knew the power:

Love's aim achieved—O happy hour!  
'Nahina, thou art mine!' I cried.  
'Now shall I have thee for my bride.'  
But once again by fate defeated  
Was I and of my triumph cheated.

"Enraptured, with young dreams aglow,  
Filled with love's fervour and elation,  
I loudly chant an incantation  
And on dark spirits call, and lo!—  
A flash of light, a crash of thunder,  
And magic whirlwinds start awake,  
I feel the earth begin to quake,  
I hear it hum and rumble under  
My feet, and there in front of me,  
The picture of senility,  
A crone stands. She is bent and shrunken,  
Her hair is white, her eye is sunken  
And glazed with age, her head is shaking....  
And yet, and yet—had I mistaken  
Her for another?—Nay, O knight;  
Nahina 'twas!... In doubt, in fright  
The horrid vision now I measured  
With unbelieving gaze, my sight  
Mistrusting.... 'Thou! Art thou my treasured  
Nahina? Speak!' from me the cry  
Burst forth. 'Where is thy beauty? Why  
Have the gods changed thee so? Have I  
Long, then, from life and love been parted?'  
'For forty years!' I heard her say.  
'Indeed, I'm seventy to-day!...  
But never mind! So are lives charted  
And so they pass. Thy spring has flown  
And mine has too. We are, I own,  
Old, both, but be thou not disheartened  
By fickle youth's swift passage. True,  
I'm grey, a trifle crooked too,  
Less lively and perhaps less charming  
Than once I was....' This in disarming  
Tones she declared, her voice a squeak.  
'Come, do not look, I beg, so tragic....  
I am—in confidence I speak—  
Like thee become well versed in magic.'



"A sorceress! What had she said!...  
Struck dumb was I by the admission  
And felt a fool, a dunderhead  
For all my store of erudition.

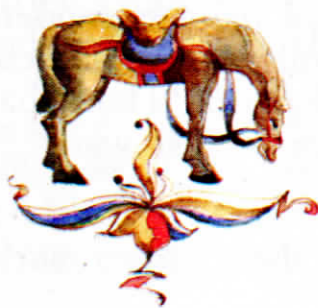
"But worse by far was that the spell  
That I had cast worked far too well.  
My shrivelled idol flared with passion;  
She loved me—loved me to obsession!  
Her grey lips twisted in a smile,  
In graveyard tones the old hag muttered  
The wildest of avowals, while  
I suffered silently, in utter  
Disgust and loathing, and upon  
The ground my eyes kept. She wheezed on,  
And though, by fits of coughing shaken,  
So was she with her subject taken,  
She never stopped. 'My poor heart is  
For tender passion born and bliss,'  
She croaked. "'Tis love alone I covet  
And hunger for. I flame, I burn....  
O come to me, for thee I yearn;  
I'm dying, dying, my beloved!'

"'Twas lustfully that she, Ruslan,  
Was ogling me. Her bony fingers  
Caught greedily at my caftan....  
There to remain, knight, there to linger  
Beside her was sheer agony;  
I squeezed my eyes shut, for, you see,  
I could not bear it any longer,  
And broke away.... 'Knave! Thus to wrong me!'  
She yelped. 'A pure maid's life—quite shattered!  
Such villainy! For shame! For shame!  
As if my love so little mattered!  
Alas! I am myself to blame;  
You men, I vow, are all the same.  
By thy seduction helpless rendered,  
To passion wholly I surrendered....  
Deceiver! Blackguard! Thou shalt know  
What vengeance is, just wait!...'

"'Twas so  
We parted. In these forests buried

E'er since, a hermit's solitary  
Life have I led, and of the balm  
Of nature tasted, by its calm  
And wisdom doctored. I'll not tarry  
Long here on earth.... To you alone  
Do I impart this; know: the crone  
Has not forgot her unrequited,  
Scorned passion. In her soul, her blighted  
And ugly soul, love's changed to spite;  
And that she'll come to hate you, knight,  
As she does me, you can be sure.  
But be not, I entreat you, frightened:  
Grief's bound to pass, 'twill not endure."

The old man's story hungrily  
Our knight took in. Enchanted by it,  
He sat there rapt and clear of eye,  
Untouched by sleep. The night was quiet:  
He never heard it winging by.  
Now dawn's bright glow the heavens graces....  
With rueful smile Ruslan embraces  
The mage, and, full of gratitude,  
The cave leaves in a hopeful mood.  
He leaps into the saddle deftly,  
Grips with his legs the whinnying steed,  
And with a whistle moves off swiftly.  
"Be with me, Father, in my need!"  
He cries. "Farewell!" Across the clearing  
The answer carries, his heart cheering:  
"Forgive your bride and love her, heed  
My counsel, knight! Farewell! Godspeed!"







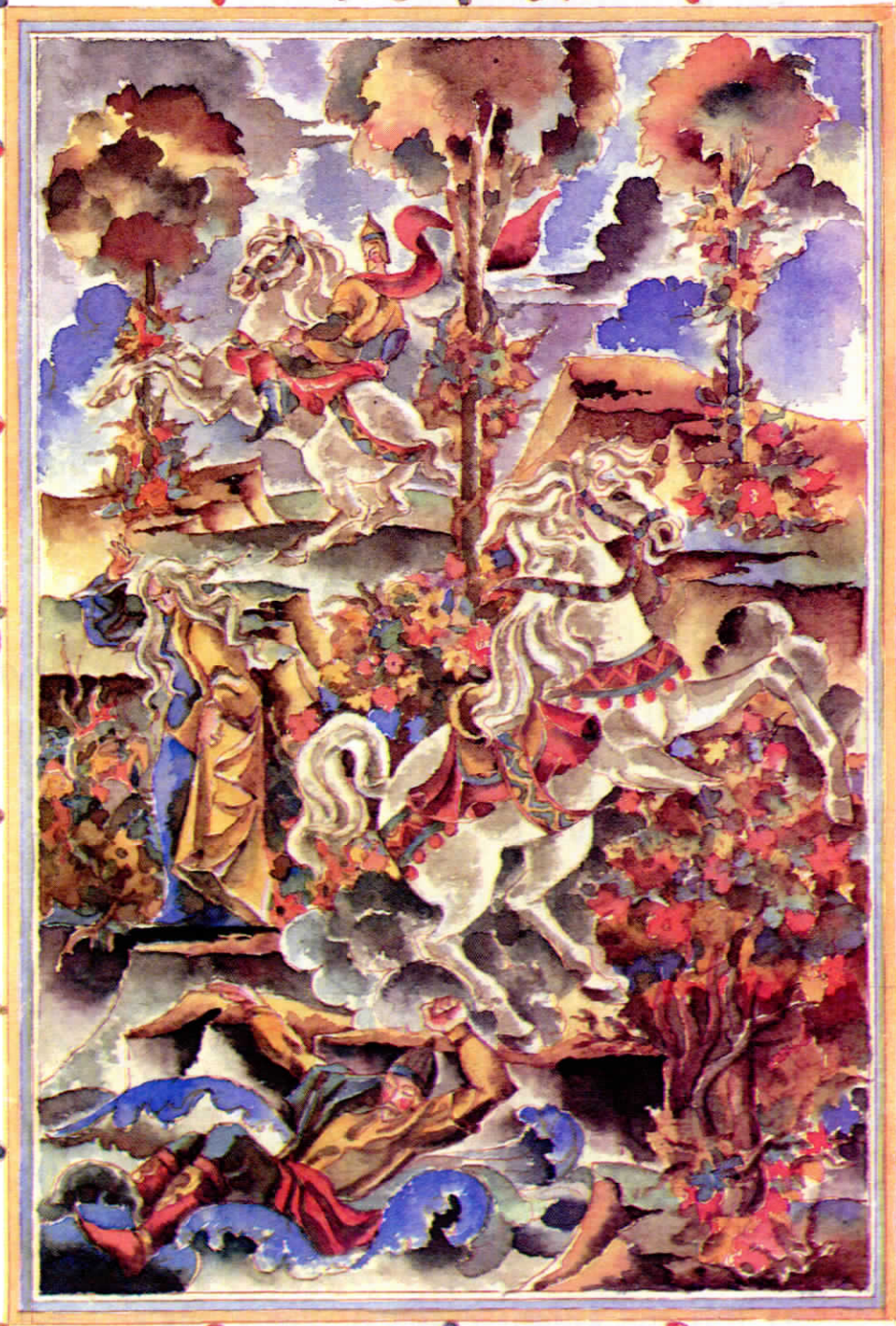
## CANTO THE SECOND

You whose swords clash in contest gory,  
Persist in your dread rivalry;  
Pay tribute full to sombre glory  
And relish hate and enmity!  
Let the world, gaping at your deadly  
Encounters, freeze—know: none will try  
To interfere; more—none will, sadly,  
Of pity for you breathe a sigh.  
You who compete in different fashion,  
Of the remote Parnassian heights  
The mettlesome and valiant knights,  
Fence if you must, but with discretion,  
From vulgar bickering refrain:  
The herd 'twill only entertain.  
And as for you, by tender passion  
Made bitter rivals, pray remain  
On cordial terms—for he who's fated  
To win a maid's love this will do  
Though all mankind should lay plans to  
Keep the two lovers separated....  
Why fume?—It's silly and a sin.

When bold Rogdai, his heart with dim  
But chilling boding filled, had parted  
From his companions three and started  
Across a lonely tract of land,  
As he rode swiftly o'er the woody  
And silent plain, on his ills brooding,  
The hapless youth could ill withstand,  
So troubled were his thoughts, so painful,  
The Evil Spirit's taunting baneful,  
And whispered: "Smite I shall and kill!  
Beware, Ruslan, Ludmila will  
Weep over you, I swear!..." And turning  
His steed about, down dale, up hill  
He galloped, for sweet vengeance yearning.

Meanwhile, Farlaf, that fearless soul,  
Had spent in sleep the morning whole,  
And then, from noon's hot rays well sheltered,  
Beside a brook himself he settled  
To dine and thus to fortify  
His moral fiber. By and by  
He saw a horseman in the mead  
Toward him charging. Disconcerted,  
The knight with quite uncommon speed  
His food and all his gear deserted,  
His mail, his helmet, and his spear,  
And 'thout a backward glance went flying  
Off on his horse. "Stop, wretch, you hear!"  
The other cried, to halt him trying.  
"Just let me catch you, and you're dead—  
I'll make you shorter by a head!"  
Farlaf, who found the voice belonged  
To bold Rogdai, his rival, longed  
The more—quite wisely—to be gone  
And his horse lashed and goaded on.  
So will a rabbit, danger scenting,  
Stop short, and, to escape attempting,  
Ears folded, by great leaps and bounds  
O'er lea, wood, mound, run from the hounds.  
Where passed the chase in all its glory  
Spring had the snows of winter hoary  
Into great, muddy torrents thawed,  
And these at earth's breast ceaseless gnawed.







Farlaf's horse, now a wide ditch facing,  
His tail shook mightily, and, bracing  
Himself, in his teeth took the bit  
And leapt across, nor was a whit  
The worse for it. Not so his timid  
And far less nimble rider who  
Rolled down, head over heels, on to  
The mud, and lay there, floundering in it  
And waiting to be slain.... Rogdai  
Storms up, a wrathful vision. "Die,  
Poltroon!" he roars, and his sword raises,  
But then is brought up short; his gaze is  
Fixed on his foe. Farlaf! Dismay,  
Surprise, vexation, rage display  
Themselves on his face. His teeth grinding,  
He swears aloud. We see him riding  
Away in haste, inclined to laugh  
Both at himself and at Farlaf.

Soon on a pathway upward winding  
He met a hag with snowy hair,  
A feeble, bent old thing. "Go there!"  
She quavered, "That's where you will find him!"  
And with her staff she pointed north.  
Rogdai felt cheered; nay, more—elated.  
Quite unaware that death awaited  
Him up ahead, he started forth.

And our Farlaf? Upon his bed  
Of mud we see him breathless lie.  
"Where has my rival gone? Am I  
Alive," he asks himself, "or dead?"  
Then suddenly from overhead  
A voice comes—it is hoarse, deep-sounding....  
"Rise, stalwart mine, all's calm around you,"  
The crone says. "Here's your charger; you  
Need fear, good youth, no dangers new."

At this the knight crawled slowly out  
And looked around him in some doubt.  
Relieved, he uttered sighing deeply:  
"I do believe I got off cheaply....  
The Lord be thanked! No broken bones!"



"Ludmila's far away," the crone's  
Next words were, "and though we be tempted  
To try and find her, to attempt it  
Is most unwise.... No, no," she drones,  
"We'll not succeed: too many hurdles,  
And, all in all, to roam the world is  
A rather risky enterprise;  
You'd soon regret it. I advise  
You to go straightway home to Kiev;  
On your estate your days you'll spend  
In ease, behind you danger leaving—  
Ludmila won't escape us, friend!"

With this she vanished, and our knight,  
The flame of love well-nigh extinguished  
And dreams of martial fame relinquished,  
Set off for home. 'Twas not yet night,  
But any noise however slight,  
A rustling leaf, a bird in flight,  
A brook's song put him in a sweat.

But let us now Farlaf forget  
And to Ruslan turn.... On he races,  
Across a wood we see him ride....  
In thought he lovingly embraces  
His only love, his fair young bride.  
"My wife," he cries, "my own Ludmila,  
Will e'er I find you, dear one, will I  
Your gaze full of enchantment meet  
And hear your tender voice and sweet?  
Say, is it in a wizard's power  
You are, and is the early bloom  
Of youth to fade? Are you to sour  
And wither in a dungeon's gloom?...  
Or will one of my rivals seize you  
And bear you off?—Nay, love, rest easy:  
My head is on my shoulders still,  
And this my sword I wield with skill."

One day at dusk Ruslan was riding  
Along a steep and rocky shore,  
The stream below in shadow hiding,  
When with a whine an arrow o'er  
His head flew, and behind him sounded

The clang of mail, the heavy pounding  
Of hooves, a horse's piercing neigh.  
"Halt!" someone shouted. "Halt, I say!"  
The knight glanced round: far out afield,  
With spear raised high and ready shield,  
A rider galloped whistling shrilly.  
Ruslan, his heart with anger filling,  
His steed turned speedily about  
And charged toward his grim assailant  
Who met him with a brazen shout:  
"Aha, I've caught you up, my gallant!  
First taste of steel, then seek your fair!"  
Now, this Ruslan could little bear;  
He recognized the voice and hated  
The sound of it. "How dares he! I'll—"

But where's Ludmila? For a while  
Let's leave the two men; we have waited  
Quite long enough, 'tis time to turn  
To our dear maid now and to learn  
How she, one lovely past comparing,  
Has at her captor's hands been faring.

A confidant of wayward fancy,  
Not always modest have I been,  
And this my narrative commencing,  
Dared to describe the night-cloaked scene  
In which our fair Ludmila's charms  
Were from her husband's eager arms  
Whisked off. Poor maid! When, quick as lightning,  
The villain with one movement mighty  
Removed you from the bridal bed,  
And like a whirlwind, skyward soaring,  
Through coils of smoke charged on, ahead,  
Toward his kingdom's mountains hoary,  
You swooned away, but all too soon  
Recovered from that welcome swoon  
To find yourself, aghast, dumfounded,  
By lofty castle walls surrounded.

Thus—it was summer—at the door  
Of my house lingering, I saw  
The sultan of the henhouse chasing  
One of his ladies, and moved by





Hot passion, with his wings embracing  
The flustered, nervous hen.... On high  
A grey kite hovered, old marauder  
Of poultry-yards; in rings o'erhead  
He slowly sailed, unseen; then, boldly,  
With lightning speed, dropped down, a dread  
And ruthless foe, his plans death-dealing  
Laid earlier.... Up soars he, sealing  
The fate of his poor, helpless prey.  
Clutched in his talons, far away  
He bears her to the safety of  
A dark crevasse. In vain, with fear  
And hopeless sorrow filled, his love  
The rooster calls: he sees her airy  
And weightless fluff come drifting near,  
By swift, cool breezes downward carried.

Like some dread dream, oblivion  
Ludmila chains. She cannot rise  
And, in a stupor, moveless lies....  
The soft, grey light of early dawn  
Revives her, deep within her rouses  
Unconscious fear and restlessness;  
Sweet thoughts of joy her heart possess,  
For surely her beloved spouse is  
Nearby!... "Where are you, dear one? Come!..."  
She whispers, and—is stricken dumb.  
Where is your chamber, my Ludmila?  
Poor, luckless maiden, you lie pillowed  
Upon a lofty feather-bed;  
On silken cushions rests your head;  
The canopy that floats above you  
Is tasselled, rich, and like the cover,  
Patterned most prettily. Brocade  
Is everywhere, and winking, blazing  
Gems likewise. From fine censers made  
Of gold rise balmy vapours hazy....  
But 'tis enough! This pen of mine  
Must fly description—by another  
Was I forestalled: Scheherezade.  
And no house, be it e'er so fine,  
Affords you any pleasure, mind you,  
Unless your love is there beside you.



Just then, in garments clad air-thin,  
Three comely maidens tiptoed in.  
With bows for the occasion suited  
Ludmila mutely they saluted,  
Then one, of footstep light, drew near  
And with ethereal fingers plaited  
Her silken locks, a way, I hear,  
Of dressing hair that has outdated  
Long since become. Upon her head  
A diadem of fine pearls setting,  
She then withdrew. With softest tread  
The second maid approached; 'thout letting  
Herself glance up, all modesty,  
In sky-blue silk Ludmila she  
Gowned quickly, and her golden tresses  
Crowned with a mist-like veil that fell  
About her shoulders. There—how well  
It shields her, with what grace caresses  
Charms for a goddess fit; her feet



Encased are in a pair of neat  
And dainty shoes. The third maid brings her  
A pearl-incrusted sash; unseen,  
A gay-voiced songstress ballads sings her....  
But neither shoes, nor gown, nor e'en  
The pearly sash and diadem  
The princess please; no song delights her,  
Indifferent she stays to them;  
In vain the looking-glass invites her.  
To eye her new-found finery  
And revel in its wealth and splendour—  
The sight seems almost to offend her:  
Her gaze is blank; sad, silent she.

Those who love truth and like to read  
The heart's most secret book, must know  
That should a lady, plunged in woe,  
In spite of habit or of reason,  
Oblivious of time or season,  
Into a mirror through her tears  
Forget to peek—well, then she is  
In a most grievous state, indeed.

Ludmila, left alone again,  
Uncertain what to do, beneath  
A window stands and through the pane  
Drear, boundless reaches, wondering, sees.  
On carpets of eye-dazzling snow  
Her gaze rests; filled is she with sadness....  
Before her all is stark white deadness;  
The peaks of brooding mountains show  
Above the silent plains, and, sombre,  
Seem wrapt in deep, eternal slumber:  
No wayfarer plodding slowly past,  
No smoke from out a chimney trailing,  
No hunter's horn resounding gaily  
Over the snow-bound, endless waste....  
Only the rebel wind's wail dismal  
At times disrupts the calm abysmal,  
And etched against the sky's bleak grey,  
The nude and orphaned forests sway.

Despairing, tearful, poor Ludmila  
Her face hides in her hands, unwilling

To think of what may be in store....  
She pushes at a silver door  
Which opens with a sound most pleasing;  
Before her, with their beauty teasing  
The eye, spread gardens that surpass  
King Solomon's in loveliness,  
And e'en Armide's and those that to  
Taurida's prince belonged. The view  
Is one of trees, green arbours forming  
And swaying gently; in the air  
Of myrtle floats the sweet aroma;  
Palms line the paths, and bays; with their  
Proud crowns the mighty cedars boldly  
The heavens brush; a gleam with golden  
Fruit are the orange groves; a pond  
Mirrors it all.... The hills beyond,  
The vales and copses by the blaze of  
Spring are revived; the wind of May  
Sweeps o'er the spellbound leas in play;  
In song melodious and gay  
A nightingale its sweet voice raises;  
Great fountains upward, to the sky,  
Send sprays of gems, then down, enwreathing  
The statues that, alive and breathing,  
Around them stand. If Phidias' eye  
On these could rest, he, though by Pallas  
And by Apollo taught, would, jealous,  
His magic point and chisel drop....  
In swift and fiery arcs that shatter  
'Gainst marble barriers which stop  
Their headlong downward plunge and scatter  
The tiny motes of pearly dust,  
The waterfalls cascade, while just  
A few steps farther out, in nooks  
By thick trees shadowed, rippling brooks  
Plash sleepily.... The vivid greenness  
Is by the whiteness here and there  
Flecked of the lightly-built pavilions  
That offer shelter from the glare....  
And roses, roses everywhere!...  
But comfortless is our Ludmila,  
What round her lies she does not see;  
The magic garden does not thrill her







With all its sensuous luxury....  
She walks all over, where she's going  
Not caring; more—not even knowing,  
But weeping copious tears, her eye  
Fixed sadly on the merciless sky....  
Then suddenly her gaze grows brighter,  
And to her lip her hand flies lightly:  
Despite the sparkle of the morn  
A frightening thought in her is born....  
The dread way's open: death waits for her—  
Above a torrent, there before her,  
A bridge hangs 'twixt two cliffs. Forlorn  
The hapless maid is and despondent,  
She looks upon the foaming stream,  
Her tears grow ever more abundant,  
She strikes her heaving breast—'twould seem  
She is about to jump—but no,  
We see her pause ... and onward go.

Time passes, and Ludmila, weary,  
(Too long has she been on her feet)  
Feels her tears drying as the cheering  
Thought comes that yes, it's time to eat.  
She drops down on the grass, looks round her,  
And lo!—a tent's cool walls surround her....  
The gleam of crystal! A repast  
Is set before her, unsurpassed  
In choice of food. The gentle sound of  
A harp steals near. But though at this  
She marvels, our young princess is  
Still not at peace, still sorrow-hounded.  
"A captive, from my love torn, why  
Should I not end it all and die?"  
Thinks she. "Oh, villain, you torment me  
Yet humour me: such is your whim,  
But I ... I scorn you and contempt  
Your wily ways. This feast you sent me,  
This gauzy tent wherein I sit,  
These songs, a lovelorn heart's outpouring,  
Which, for all that, are rather boring,—  
In faith, I need them not a whit!  
'Tis death I choose, death!" And repeating  
The word again, the maid starts... eating.



Ludmila rises; in a twinkling  
Gone are the tent and rich repast;  
The harp is silenced, not a tinkling  
Disturbs the calm.... On walks she, past  
The greening groves and round them wanders,  
While high above the wizard's gardens  
The moon appears, of night the queen,  
And in the heavens reigns supreme.  
From every side soft mists come drifting  
And on the hilltops seek repose.  
Our princess feels inclined to doze,  
And is by some strange powers lifted  
As gently as by spring's own breeze  
And carried through the air with ease  
Back to the chamber richly scented  
With rose oil, and put down again  
Upon the couch where, grief-tormented,  
She lay before. And now the same  
Three youthful maidens reappear  
And, round her bustling, they unfasten  
Hooks and the like of them and hasten  
To take her raiments off. They wear  
An anxious look; of mute compassion  
Their aspect leaves a faint impression  
And of a dull reproach to fate.  
But let's not tarry more: 'tis late,  
And fair Ludmila is by tender  
And skillful hands by now undressed.  
Robed in a snowy shift that renders  
Her charms more charming still, to rest  
She lays her down. The three maids, sighing,  
Back out with bows, the door is shut.  
What does our captive?—Lies there, but  
Shakes leaf-like, and, sleep from her flying,  
Feels chilled and dares not breathe. Her gaze  
Bedimmed by fear, she moveless stays  
And tense, with all her being trying  
To penetrate the voiceless gloom,  
The numbing stillness of the room;  
Her heart throbs wildly, fitfully,  
An agitated, endless thrumming....  
The silence seems to whisper; she  
Hears someone to her bedside coming

And in her pillows hides, and oh!—  
The horror of it—footsteps.... No!  
It cannot be, she must be dreaming.  
The door swings open; there's a flare  
Of light, and silent, pair by pair,  
A file of Moors, their sabres gleaming,  
Steps in with even, measured stride.  
A look most grave and solemn wearing,  
On downy pillows they are bearing  
A silver beard. Puffed up with pride,  
A pose assuming grand and stately,  
Behind it marches in sedately  
A hunchbacked dwarf, chin high. It is  
To him the beard belongs. On his  
Clean-shaven pate a tall, close-fitting  
Tarbush, wound round with cloth, is sitting.  
He nears her, and Ludmila, led  
By shock and fright, flies off her bed  
And at him, and his cap she clutches,  
And lifts a shaking fist, no doubt  
To try to shield herself. And such is  
The shriek the poor maid now lets out  
The Moors are deafened by't, while paler  
Than his fair captive turns her jailer.  
He makes to flee, half turns about,  
Claps hands to ears in desperation,  
And trips, a victim of frustration  
And umbrage, on his beard, falls to  
The floor, gets up, falls down anew,  
Is quite entangled.... In a dither  
His dusky menials all are. Hither  
And thither rush they, shout and push,  
Then, flushed, confused, a wee bit angered,  
They bear him off to be untangled  
And quite forget the dwarf's tarbush.

But what of our young hero? Pray  
Remember the unlooked-for fracas.  
Your pencil, quick, Orlovsky! Make us  
A sketch of that night-shrouded fray.

The moon shines down upon a cruel  
And savage match. Incensed, the young  
Combatants fight their bloody duel







'Thout respite. Their great lances flung  
Are far from them, their swords lie shattered,  
Likewise their shields, their mail is spattered  
With blood.... And yet the gory joust  
Goes on. Beneath them, waging battle,  
Their steeds whip up dark clouds of dust.  
In an embrace of steel the two  
Bold knights are locked (they're on their mettle),  
But seem quite moveless, as if to  
Their saddles welded. Rage and ire  
Their limbs turn stiff. A liquid fire  
Sweeps like a torrent through their veins;  
They're intertwined; chest 'gainst chest strains—  
But now they weaker grow, they tire;  
'Tis clear that soon one of them must  
Go under, by the other bested.  
Ruslan with iron hand a thrust  
To his fierce rival gives, and, wresting  
Him from the saddle, lifts him high  
Above himself and never falters  
But hurls him down into the waters  
That seethe below them, shouting "Die!"

I'm sure, my friends, you've guessed aright  
With whom my brave and gallant knight  
His duel fought. Of battles deadly  
The seeker rash it was, Rogdai.  
The hope of Kiev, darkly, madly  
Ludmila loved he and was by  
This led to seek his rival. On  
A Dnieper bank it was he found him:  
Persistence and resolve had won!  
Alas! The hero's strength unbounded  
Deserted him, and in the wild  
He met his end, was then beguiled  
By a young mermaid who caressed him,  
And to her icy bosom pressed him,  
And, laughing, drew him down at last....  
For many years thereafter, when  
Night came and o'er the heavens cast  
Its sable shroud, his ghost, appearing  
There on the bank or in a clearing,  
Would frighten lonely fishermen.





### CANTO THE THIRD

You tried to stay from all eyes hidden  
Save friendship's own, my verse—in vain!  
To envy's scrutiny unbidden  
Are you subjected all the same.  
A mindless critic has already  
The ticklish question asked me, why,  
As if to mock Ruslan, his lady  
I have been calling "maid".

Now, I  
Appeal to you, my good, kind reader,  
Does not with his lips malice speak?  
Come, Zoilus, come, sly-tongued schemer—  
What fitting answer can I make?  
Blush, wretch, and God be with you, argue  
With you I'll not, my heart is free  
Of tainted thought, and silent, mark you,  
I stay, kept so by modesty.  
Dull Hymen's victim, you, Climène,  
Will understand; yes, I can see you  
Gaze downward languidly, for me you  
Feel deeply, sweet.... A tear falls, then  
Another on the lines my pen

Has scribbled; clear are they, I know,  
To hearts like yours; you flush, the glow  
Fades from your eye, your muted sigh is  
Most eloquent—a time of trials  
Is nearing.... Quake, O jealous one!  
For wilful Love with Anger mated  
A plot lays—yes, well may you frown:  
Your brow inglorious is fated  
To boast revenge's twin-horned crown.

A cold dawn gilds the finely chiselled  
Tops of the hills.... There reigns throughout  
Grim silence. Sulkily the wizard  
In dressing gown and still without  
His cap, sits on the bed, and, yawning,  
Seems angered by the glow of morning.  
His dusky slaves, close to him pressing,  
Are busy with his beard, a comb,  
A fine one, made of walrus bone,  
Through all its curvings gently passing.  
To give them strength and beauty, they  
Pour balm upon his termless whiskers,  
And, using curling irons, briskly  
Make waves in them.... The calm of day  
Is broken—through the window sailing,  
A dragon comes; it clangs its scaly,  
Well furbished armour, folds its wings,  
Coils swiftly into shiny rings,  
And suddenly, to the surprise  
Of all, takes old Nahina's guise.  
“Hail, brother mine!” says she. “I knew you  
Till now by loud report alone,  
But never grudged you, be it known,  
The high esteem and honour due you.  
Now secret fate has joined us two  
In enmity. The threat of danger  
Hangs like a dark cloud over you,  
While I'm to be the sole avenger  
Of slighted honour, mine, my own;  
Its voice I heed.”

The dwarf, a wily  
Look on his face, in unctuous tones  
Makes his reply: “I value highly,”—



To her he now extends his hand—  
“Divine Nahina, our alliance.  
We’ll easily the Finn withstand;  
I fear him not at all, for mine is  
The greater strength; he ill compares  
With me, I vow. This beard I wear,  
Grey though it is, has special powers,  
And no bold knight, no foe of ours,  
However brave, no mortal can,  
Unless by hostile force ’tis severed,  
Upset my least design or plan;  
Ludmila will be mine forever.  
As for Ruslan, to die he’s doomed!”  
“To die! To die!” the witch repeated  
With catty spite. “To die!” she boomed.  
And then, her mission thus completed,  
She hissed three times, thrice stamped the ground,  
And flew, a dragon’s shape regaining,  
Off and away, with vengeance flaming.

In fine brocade most richly gowned  
And by the old witch cheered and heartened,  
The wizard to the maid’s apartment  
Anew decided to repair  
And take his silken whiskers there  
And lovelorn heart. We see him going  
From room to room, he passes through  
A row of them, vexation growing.  
Where is his fair young captive? To  
The park he hastes at first, then makes for  
The grove, the waterfall, the lake shore,  
The arbours, but, dear reader mine,  
Finds of the princess not a sign.  
By this he’s driven nearly frantic,  
We hear him moaning, raving, ranting;  
He pants, he shakes in every limb,  
The light of day’s obscured for him.  
“Here, slaves!” he splutters, in a flurry.  
“The maid is lost! She’s disappeared!  
Be off with you, you idlers, hurry!  
If she’s not found, with this my beard,  
I jest not, I will have you strangled.  
Beware!”

But let us leave the angered  
Dwarf, reader, and I'll tell you where  
Our maid has gone.... All night she pondered  
Her fate, of danger well aware,  
But as she wept she ... smiled. You'll wonder  
Why so.... She'd met the dwarf, and he,  
Despite the beard that she so hated,  
Seemed a mere clown, and, you'll agree,  
That fear and laughter are ill-mated.  
Ludmila rises as the dawn  
Is born, and morning's rays creep nearer,  
Her sleepy gaze unconscious drawn  
Toward a lofty, shining mirror.  
Instinctively she lifts her tresses  
From lily shoulders, o'er them passes,  
As habit tells her to, her hands  
And plaits the silky, golden strands.  
The garments that she has been given  
Lie in a corner. With a sigh  
She starts to dress, is newly driven  
To quiet tears, but keeps an eye  
Upon the faithful glass wherein  
She sees herself. A sudden whim  
To put the dwarf's hat on now seizes  
The princess. It is always fun,  
Now, is it not, to try things on,  
The very thought is one that pleases!  
Besides, by none can she be seen,  
And, what is of no smaller matter,  
There is no hat that will not flatter  
A girl who's only seventeen!  
And so the wicked midget's hat  
Ludmila turns this way and that;  
Straight, then askew she makes it sit,  
Down on her eyebrows pushes it,  
Claps it on front-to-back.... Behold!  
A miracle!—In times of old  
They happened often, it appears—  
Ludmila's image disappears,  
Gone is she from the glass completely;  
But in a moment, as she neatly  
Turns the hat round, she's there again!  
Once, twice she tries it, and the same



Thing happens. Cries the princess: "Splendid!  
My troubles now are all but ended.  
So much for you, vile dwarf, your hunt  
For me is over!" And, cheeks glowing,  
Herself to be in safety knowing,  
She puts the hat on back-to-front.

For shame! Too long has our attention  
Been claimed by beard and hat of late;  
Our hero giving up to fate,  
Of him—alack!—we made no mention.  
His duel with Rogdai behind him,  
He passes through a lonely wood,  
And in a sunlit dale we find him  
His stallion reining in. A mood  
Of sudden, awful dread comes o'er him:  
An ancient battlefield's before him,  
And grim it looks, for everywhere  
Gleam yellow bones, and here and there  
Old, broken armour lies, corroding;  
A quiver and a rusty shield  
Rest near at hand; far out afield  
Stiff, bony fingers hold a moulding  
Green sword, a skull is seen to rot  
Within a weed-grown helm. And what  
Is that ahead? A skeleton,  
That of a knight, still armed and on  
His fallen, fleshless charger seated,  
As if alive and undefeated.  
Entwined with ivy, arrows, lances,  
Spears from the earth stick. Not a sound  
Disrupts of these forlorn expanses  
The haunting silence and profound;  
The sun alone the vale invades  
Of death and of its lingering shades.

Sad-eyed the knight around him gazes.  
"O field, wide field, you bear the traces  
Of slaughter," says he with a sigh.  
"Who planted you to bones and why?  
By whose fleet stallion were you trampled?  
What bloody battle here was fought  
With perseverance unexampled?"

Who prayed here and salvation sought?  
Why are you mute, why with the grasses  
O'ergrown of cold oblivion?  
Is there escape from it for none?  
Is it that time all, all erases?  
What if upon some nameless hill  
I am to lie? Mayhap Bayan  
Will never chant of me or on  
My deeds dwell...."

Thus thought he until  
It came to him, and this most clearly,  
That what he needed—needed dearly—  
Was armour and a sword, the night  
Of combat having left him quite  
Unarmed, alack, or ... very nearly.  
On this intent, he walks around  
The battlefield where bones lie scattered  
And armour, time- and weather-battered,  
To see if something can be found.  
A sudden clank! A rousing clatter!  
The plain from numbing sleep awakes.  
A helmet and a shield, the latter  
At random picking up, he takes,  
And then a ringing horn, but no  
Sword to his liking finds, although  
Scores of them strew the field of battle:  
Being no puny modern knight,  
Young Prince Ruslan declines to settle  
For one he thinks too short or light.  
The boredom fearing of inaction,  
A steel lance chooses he for play,  
Puts on a hauberk for protection,  
And, thus arrayed, goes on his way.

The flames of sunset, slowly paling,  
Fade o'er an earth embraced by sleep.  
From out the mists the heavens veiling,  
A golden moon is seen to creep.  
The steppe grows dimmer, nighttime's hazes  
Float over it; the path looms dark.  
As our young knight rides on, his gaze is  
Drawn by a huge black mound, and—hark!—







A fearsome snore comes from't. Our hero,  
Undaunted by it, rides up nearer:  
The strange mound seems to breathe. Ruslan,  
Quite unperturbed, looks calmly on.  
Not so his steed, who balks at making  
Another step and stands there quaking  
With bristling mane and twitching ear  
In quite ungovernable fear.  
But now the pale orb born to range  
The sleepy skies, lights up the nightly,  
Mist-covered plain and mound more brightly,  
A sight revealing wondrous strange.  
Can pen describe the like?... A Head,  
A living Head is there! In slumber  
Its eyes are shut, it snores, is dead  
To all the world, but every rumble,  
Each breath and wheeze that from it comes  
The helmet stirs and sends the plumes  
That reach the shadowed heights a'swaying.  
Above the gloomy plain and greying,  
The wasteland's guard, in all its chill  
And frightful splendrousness it towers,  
An awesome hulk, part of the still  
And fearful night, possessed of powers  
Weird, menacing.... Ruslan decides  
To rouse it, and, his eyes half doubting,  
Around the Head he slowly rides.  
Here is the nose! Without dismounting,  
The nostrils with the tip of his  
Sharp lance he delicately teases.  
The great face puckers up at this;  
The great Head, eyes now open, sneezes!...  
A whirlwind starts, dust swirls, the plain  
Rocks mightily and rocks again,  
As if by a convulsion shaken.  
The whiskers, lashes, eyebrows rain  
Whole flocks of owls. The groves awaken.  
The echo sneezes. Shocked, the steed  
Lets out a neigh and rears.... Indeed,  
He all but throws the knight. A bellow  
The air rends: "Back, you foolish fellow!  
I jest not. Come and get your due:  
I gobble malaperts like you!"



Ruslan, provoked, looks round, and, reining  
His horse in sharply, laughs in scorn,  
To make a tart retort disdaining.  
“Was ever such a nuisance born!”  
The Head declares (its tones are surly).  
“Sent here by fate to try me, were you?  
What do you want? Make off! Adieu!  
I’m going back to sleep.” “Not you!”  
The prince exclaims, these rude words hearing,  
And, filled with anger and disgust,  
Says: “Silence, empty pate! A just  
Truth is it, one not said in vain:  
A massive dome, a pygmy brain!”  
And then he adds in accents searing:  
“I ride along and no grudge bear you,  
But cross my path, and I won’t spare you!”

At this, the Head, by such cheek numbed,  
To a most awful rage succumbed.  
It swelled, it flamed, its pale lips trembled,  
Turned paler still, were flecked with froth,  
Its eyes two balls of fire resembled,  
Great clouds of steam now poured from both  
Its ears and mouth. And then it started,  
Cheeks puffing up, with all its might  
To blow at our hapless knight.  
To no avail the horse, much startled,  
Head downward held and eyes squeezed tight,  
To push through rain and whirlwind strained;  
Half-blinded, terrified, and drained  
Of half his strength, he spun around  
And ran, for safer places bound.  
Ruslan made fresh attempts to guide him  
And to attack the Head anew—  
He was repulsed, at him it blew  
And cackled crazily. Behind him  
He heard it boom: “Ho, knight, where to?  
To flee is most unwise of you,  
You’ll break your neck! Come, my assailant,  
Attack me, show me just how valiant  
You are! But no, you’d better stop;  
Your poor old nag is fit to drop!”  
And sticking out its tongue, it taunted



And teased the knight. The monster's leer  
Left our young hero quite undaunted  
Though sorely vexed. He raised his spear  
And at the Head the weapon flung,  
And, quivering, the brazen tongue  
It pierced and there was to remain  
Stuck fast in it. Of blood a torrent  
Poured from the maw. The great Head's pain  
And its amazement were apparent;  
Gone was its cheek, its beet-red hue;  
Upon the prince its great eyes fastened,  
It chewed on steel, and greyer grew,  
And though still seething, was much chastened.  
So on the stage one of the Muse's  
Less worthy pupils sometimes loses  
His head, a sense of where he is  
When deafened by a sudden hiss.  
He pales, he quakes, what he is there for  
Well-nigh forgetting, with an effort  
Declaims his lines and ... stops, unheard  
By the derisive, jeering herd.  
Our gallant knight, the huge Head finding  
To be thus discomposed and dazed,  
Flew hawk-like toward it, hand upraised  
And in a heavy gauntlet cased,  
And dealt the giant cheek a blinding  
And crushing blow. There starts an echo  
That carries o'er the gloomy plain.  
The dewy grass is richly stained  
With bloody foam. For nigh a second  
The great Head sways and rocks, then, lo!—  
It topples, hits the ground below  
And starts to roll, the steel helm making  
A mighty clatter. But behold!—  
A huge sword, glittering like gold,  
A champion's sword, there's no mistaking  
The look of it, lies where the Head  
Lay 'fore its fall. The prince, elated,  
Now seizes it, and the ill-fated  
Head follows, by the fierce wish led  
To lop its ears and nose off. Routed  
It lies before him, he's about to  
Bring down the sword when a low plea,



A faint moan stops him. Startled, he  
Lets his arm sink, his ire subsiding,  
And ruth, not wrath his actions guiding.  
As in a vale snow quickly thaws  
When touched by midday's sunshine flaming,  
So supplication trims the claws  
Of vengeance, its brute powers taming.

"You brought me to my senses," sighing,  
The Head now said in accents lame.  
"Your right hand proved beyond denying  
That I have but myself to blame.  
I promise you, I will obey you,  
But mercy, mercy, knight, I pray you!  
For grim has my plight been; I too  
Was once a valiant knight like you,  
By none on battlefield excelled  
Or to lay down my arms compelled.  
And happy I—were't not for my  
Young malformed brother's rivalry!  
For Chernomor, that fount of hatred,  
Alone my downfall perpetrated!  
A bearded midget and a stain  
Upon our family's good name,  
For me who was both tall and straight  
He felt a bitter jealousy,  
But hid his all-consuming hate  
Behind an outward courtesy.  
Alas! I have been simple ever,  
While he, this wretch of comic height,  
Is diabolically clever  
And full of viciousness and spite.  
Besides—I quake as I confess this—  
That fancy beard of his possessed is  
Of magic powers: while whole it stays,  
That true embodiment of evil,  
The dwarf, is safe from harm. With base  
Intentions but in accents civil  
To me one fateful day he said:  
'I need your help.' (There's no refusing  
Such an appeal.) 'You see, perusing  
A book of magic once, I read  
That where rise mighty hills, and breakers



Against them smash, in a forsaken  
Stone vault, known to no human, lies  
A magic sword that was created  
By baneful spirits. Fascinated,  
I studied hard and learnt the meaning  
Of secret words, in this wise gleaning  
A truth to great fears giving rise:  
That this sword, so the skies portend  
And fate wills, both our lives will end  
By parting us, my friend and brother,  
Me from my beard, you from your head.  
*We* must procure the sword, none other,  
And 'thout delay'. 'Well, well,' I said,  
'What's stopping us? We need not tarry!  
You'll point the way out. Come, now, hurry,  
Get on my shoulder, brother mine;  
On to the other one a pine  
I'll hoist. If need be we will go  
To the earth's very end.' And so  
Upon our way at once we started,  
And, God be thanked, as if to spite  
The soothsay, all at first went right,  
And those far mountains, happy-hearted,  
I reached at last and went beyond,  
And there the secret dungeon found,  
And with my bare hands broke it open  
And drew the sword out, always hoping  
That fate would merciful remain.  
But no! We quarrelled once again.  
The cause?—O'er which was to possess it,  
No mean reward, I must confess it.  
He raved, I reasoned, so it went  
Until the wily one, while seeming  
To yield his ground and to relent,  
Devised, to work my ruin scheming,  
A knavish ruse. 'Enough! This sparring,  
This shameful tiff, life's pleasures marring,'  
Said he with solemn mien, 'must cease.  
Is it not better to make peace?'  
Whose sword this is to be, I'm thinking,  
Fate can decide. We'll each an ear  
Put to the ground, and if a ringing  
Should yours reach first, why, brother dear,



You will have won it.' And, so saying,  
He dropped on to the ground, and I,  
I followed suit and lay down by  
His side.... Ah, knight, there's no gainsaying  
I was a dolt, a knucklehead,  
A perfect ass to have believed him –  
I told myself I would deceive him  
And was myself deceived instead!  
The ugly wretch stood up, and, stealing  
On tiptoe to me from the back,  
The sword raised. Dastardly attack! –  
It sang, a death-blow to me dealing.  
Ere I could turn, my poor head was  
No longer in its place, alas.  
Preserved by some dark, occult force,  
It lives (which is no boon, of course),  
But all the rest of me, unburied,  
Rots in a place to man unknown;  
With blackthorn thickly overgrown  
My frame is; by the midget carried  
I (just the head) was to this spot  
And left to guard – ignoble lot! –  
The magic sword. For ever after  
It shall be yours, 'tis only right.  
Fate's kind to you; should you, O knight,  
The dwarf meet, be he e'er so crafty,  
Avenge me – with this great sword smite  
The ruthless knave, my heart relieving  
Of all its suffering and grieving.  
The juicy smack you gave me I  
Will then forget, without a sigh  
Or a reproach this sad world leaving."



## CANTO THE FOURTH

Each morning as I wake from slumber  
To God I tender heartfelt praise  
That of magicians nowadays  
There is a marked decrease in number,  
And that they render now far less  
Precarious our marriages.  
In fact, their spells need not be dreaded  
By those of us but newly wedded.  
But there is witchery and guile,  
Blue eyes, a tender voice, a smile,  
A dimpled cheek, and all the rest,  
Which to avoid, I find, is best.  
The honeyed poison they exude  
Intoxicates; I dread, I fear them.  
Like me beware of staying near them,  
Embrace repose and quietude.

O wondrous genius of rhyme,  
O bard of love and love's sweet dreaming,  
You who portray the sly and scheming  
Dwellers of hell and realms divine,  
Of this inconstant Muse of mine  
The confidant and keeper faithful!



Forgive me, Northern Orpheus, do,  
For recklessly presuming to  
Fly after you in my tale playful  
And catching in a most quaint lie  
Your wayward lyre....

My good friends, I  
Know that you heard about the evil  
Old wretch, the hapless sinner who  
In days of yore sold to the devil  
His own soul and his daughters' too;  
Of how through charity and fasting  
And faith and prayer sincere, long-lasting  
And penitence without complaint  
He found a patron in a saint;  
How, when the hour struck, he died,  
How his twelve daughters slept, enchanted.  
Stirred were we, yes, and terrified  
By visions strangely darkness-mantled,  
By Heaven's wrath, the Arch-fiend's fury,  
The sinner's torments. With enduring  
Delight and joy, let us confess,  
We eyed the chaste maids' loveliness,  
Walked with them, sad of heart and weeping,  
Around the castle's toothy wall,  
Or stayed beside them, vigil keeping  
O'er their calm sleep, their peaceful thrall.  
We called upon Vadim, exhorted  
Him to come soon, and when the blest,  
The holy ones awoke, escorted  
Them to their father's place of rest.  
Yet had we been deceived and dare I  
The truth speak and misgiving bury?...

Ratmir goads his steed on, his way  
Toward southern plains impatient making,  
Filled with the hope of overtaking  
Ludmila 'fore the end of day....  
The crimson skies turn slowly darker  
And vainly with his gaze he strains  
To pierce the haze that cloaks the plains  
And sleepy stream. A last ray sparkles  
Above the wood and paints it gold.

By nighttime's dark, thick veil enfolded,  
Our knight rides past black, jutting boulders....  
Oh, for a place to sleep!... Behold!—  
A vale before him lies, an old  
Walled castle perching high above it  
Upon a cliff top; shadow-covered,  
At every corner turrets show.  
With all a swan's glide, smooth and slow,  
Along the wall there walks a maiden;  
By twilight's faint ray lit is she,  
And on the soft air dreamily  
Her song floats, in the distance fading:

“Night cloaks the lea; from far away  
The chilling winds of ocean carry.  
Come, youthful roamer, do not tarry;  
Take shelter in our castle, pray!

“The nights in languid calm we spend,  
The days in feasts and merrymaking.  
Come, youthful wanderer, attend  
This fête of ours, to joy awaking.

“We many are and beauties all;  
Our lips are soft, our speeches tender.  
Come, youthful wanderer, surrender  
And heed our joyous, secret call!

“For thee, O knight, at birth of morning  
A farewell cup of wine we'll fill.  
Heed thou our summons with a will,  
Our gentle plea refrain from scorning.

“Night cloaks the lea, from far away  
The chilling winds of ocean carry.  
Come, youthful roamer, do not tarry,  
Take shelter in our castle, pray!”

He hears her in this manner greet him  
And hastens, tempted, to the gate  
Where other fair maids, smiling, wait,  
A throng of them come out to meet him.  
Their eyes to his face glued, they seek  
To make him welcome. How entrancing  
Their speeches are, the words they speak!...







Two of them lead away his prancer.  
The castle enters he; en masse  
The fair young hermits follow. As  
One of his winged helm relieves him,  
Another 'thout his armour leaves him,  
A third removes his sword and shield.  
The garb of warfare's bound to yield  
To flimsier dress. But first the splendours  
Of a true Russian bath wait for  
The wayworn youth. In torrents endless  
We see the steaming water pour  
Into the silver tubs; it eddies  
And swirls; swift fountains upward send  
Sprays that the warm air coolness lend,  
A breezy freshness; all's made ready  
To please and gratify the khan.  
Rich are the rugs that he lies on!  
Transparent wisps of steam curl o'er him;  
The maids, all half-nude loveliness,  
Around him crowd, a mute caress  
Hid in their downcast eyes, and for him  
Care with a wordless tenderness.  
Above him one waves birch twigs that  
Send off sweet scents, another, at  
His side stays put and waxes busy,  
The juice of spring's fresh roses using  
To cool his weary legs and arms  
And drown in aromatic balms  
His curly locks. Ratmir, enraptured,  
Forgets Ludmila, long since captured,  
And her once dreamt-of, longed-for charms.  
With languor filled and with desire,  
His roving eye a gleam, he burns,  
All passion, and, his heart afire,  
For love and its fulfilment yearns.



But now the baths he leaves, and, wearing  
Rich velvets, to a feast sits down,  
With the young sirens gladly sharing  
The wonders of the board. I own  
I am no Homer to be singing  
In lofty verse (not mine his pen)  
The feasts of Grecian fighting men



And their great goblets' merry ringing.  
 No, like Parny I would that my  
 Imprudent lyre might tender sigh  
 O'er love's sweet kiss and sing the praises  
 Of nude forms dimmed by night's soft hazes!...  
 Lit by the moon the castle is;  
 I see a chamber where, reclining  
 Upon a couch, Ratmir sleeps, pining  
 For love in dreamy languor. His  
 Once pallid brow and cheeks are flaming,  
 His lips, half-open, are aglow  
 And seem to be in secret claiming  
 Another's lips; he heaves a low,  
 A moan-like, lingering sigh, and, seizing  
 The quilt, with quickened, fevered breathing,  
 To his breast presses it.... The door  
 Squeaks open, moon beams streak the floor,  
 A maid steals in.... Awake, Ratmir!  
 Of sleep asunder tear the meshes!  
 Night's every moment is too precious,  
 Pray waste them not!... The maid draws near  
 The sleeping knight with softest tread....  
 His face, on hot down pillowed, blazes,  
 The silk quilt's slipped from off the bed.  
 She holds her breath and at him gazes,  
 Entranced by what she sees, by this  
 Limp, sensuous form now left 'thout cover:  
 She's sanctimonious Artemis  
 Beside her youthful shepherd lover.  
 Then, gracefully and lightly she  
 Puts on the couch a rounded knee,  
 And o'er the lucky sleeper leaning,  
 Sighs deeply, to his breathing listens,  
 And rouses him from sensuous dreaming  
 With passionate and fiery kisses....

But stay! Beneath my slowing fingers  
 The virgin lyre now turns still,  
 My shy voice weaker grows—we will  
 Leave young Ratmir, I dare not sing of  
 Him more or in this vein go on:  
 'Tis time, friends, to recall Ruslan,  
 That stalwart staunch as he is fearless,

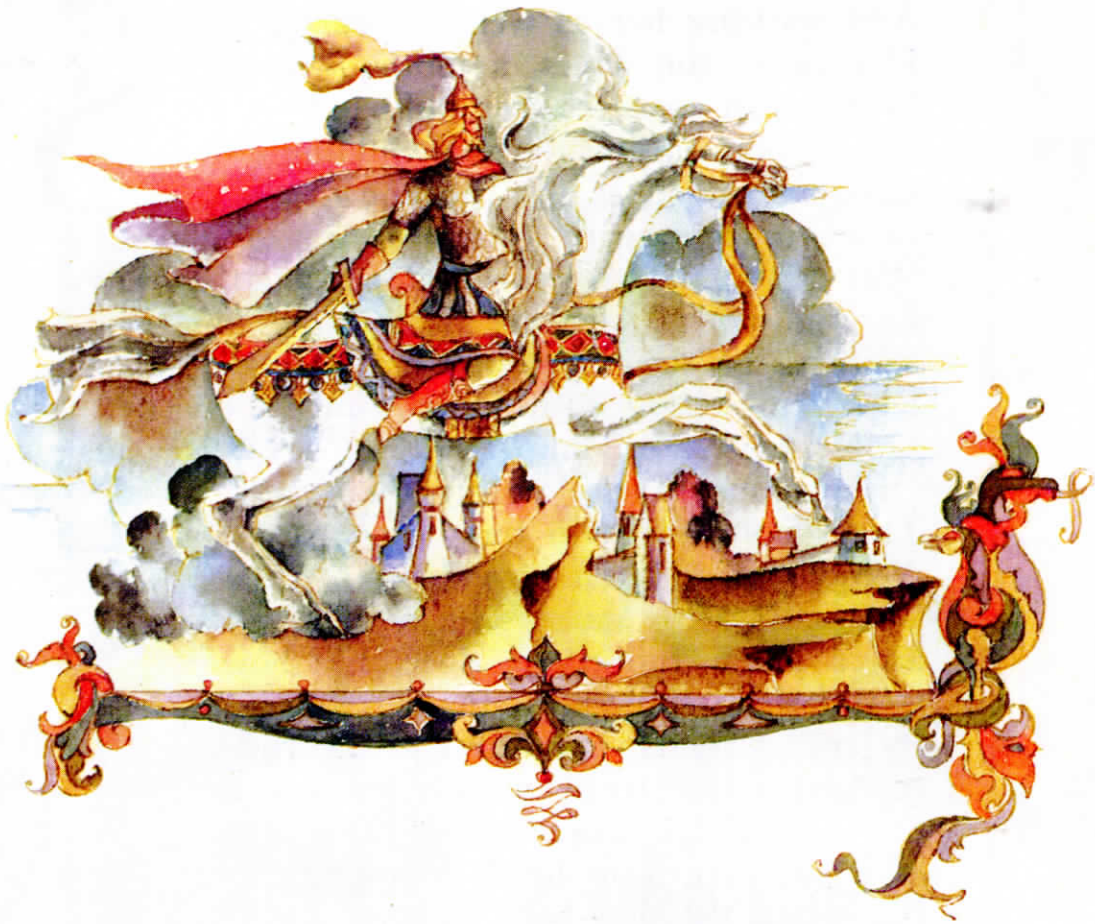


That lover true, that gallant peerless.  
Exhausted by the mighty fray,  
Beneath the Head he now lies sleeping,  
But early morning's shining ray  
Already o'er the sky comes creeping,  
And turns the Head's thick locks in play  
To molten gold. Our young knight, blinking,  
So sharp's the light, from earthen bed  
Springs quickly up, and in a twinkling  
By his swift steed is onward sped.

The days run on, the fields turn yellow,  
The leaves drop from the trees' bared crowns;  
The autumn wind's fierce whistling drowns  
The winged songsters' music mellow.  
The nude brown hills are daily haunted  
By heavy fogs, for winter's near.  
But our young gallant knows no fear  
And, by its icy breath undaunted,  
Heads northward. Daily now he meets  
Fresh barriers: now bravely fights he  
Another knight, now beats a mighty  
And awesome giant, now defeats  
A crafty witch. One night he even  
As in a dream saw mermaids sit  
On swaying, mist-clothed branches lit  
By silver moonbeams. Closer driven,  
He watched them, full of wonder. They  
Said ne'er a word, but smiling slyly,  
Tried to enchant and to beguile him.  
By kind fate shielded, fast away  
The stalwart rode: they could not win him,  
Desire soundly slept within him;  
To find Ludmila was his goal:  
For he was hers—hers, heart and soul.

Meanwhile, kept from the dwarf's advances  
Safe by the hat that she has on,  
Annoyed by no unwanted glances,  
For thus arrayed, she's seen by none,  
What does Ludmila?... Silent, teary,  
She walks the garden paths alone  
And pines for Prince Ruslan, her dearly  
Beloved spouse; then, to her home



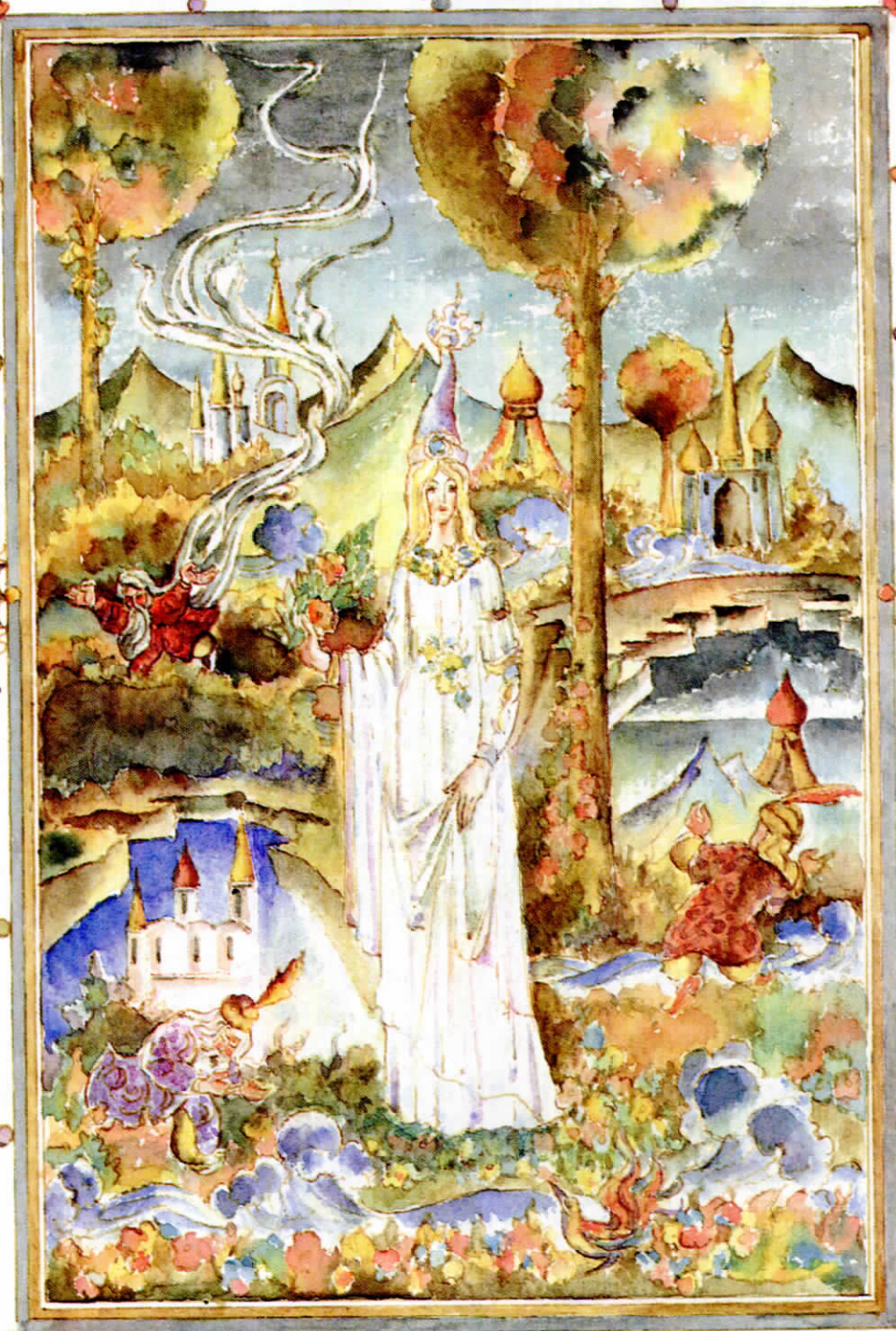


In far-off Kiev her thoughts flying,  
She brightens and, no longer sighing,  
Embraces father, brothers, sees  
Her youthful playmates in her dreams  
And her old nannies; separation  
And thralldom suddenly forgot,  
She's back among them all; but not  
For long does her imagination  
Bear her away with it, and soon  
Anew is she immersed in gloom....  
As for the lovesick villain's minions,  
His orders wordless they obey  
And search the castle, the pavilions.  
The grounds 'thout respite night and day.  
They shout, they rush about insanely,  
But all, let us admit it, vainly,  
For being an accomplished tease,  
The maid provoked them without cease.  
Before them suddenly appearing,  
She'd call out happily, "Yoo-hoo!"

And spotting her as well as hearing  
Her voice, the slaves, a motley crew,  
Would run to catch her only to  
Seize upon empty air; her tinkling  
Laugh sounded as the cap she drew  
Down on her head, and in a twinkling  
Was gone.... Where she had passed, they knew,  
For signs of it, however fleeting,  
Were to be seen: from off a tree  
Ripe fruit might vanish, grass might be  
Left crushed and limp; that she'd been eating  
Or drinking or else resting there  
They could not help but be aware.  
A cedar or a birch provided  
The maid with shelter; on a bough  
She'd perch and try to doze, but how  
Could sleep come to a maiden blinded  
By endless tears, her heart grief-torn!...  
Against a tree trunk weakly leaning,  
She might sigh wearily and yawn  
And fall a prey to fitful dreaming....  
But when the new-born light of day  
Night's shadows drove away, and pearly  
The skies turned, 'neath the fall's cool spray  
She'd wash. The dwarf, one morning early,  
Saw, upward forced by hands unseen,  
The water play, then join the stream....  
Till darkness had anew descended  
And moonbeams the lone gardens combed,  
Of spirit sore, by none attended,  
Ludmila its far reaches roamed.  
At times the echoes would be bringing  
Her sweet voice closer, softly singing.  
Threads from a Persian shawl, a leaf  
Chewed through, a tear-stained handkerchief,  
A garland by her quick hands made  
Might be found lying in a glade.

His passion and frustration mounting,  
All else save his piqued pride discounting,  
The dwarf has but a single thought:  
That the young princess must be caught.  
Thus did famed Lemnos' hobbling smith,







Accepting the connubial wreath  
From the unrivaled Aphrodite,  
Decide to snare her charms, delighting  
The laughing gods by showing them  
Of love the cunning stratagem.

One day the maid sat bored and weary  
Inside a marble summer-house  
And gazed abstracted through the boughs  
Of trees by wind swayed at the cheery,  
Bloom-covered meadow just beyond.  
“My love!” she hears. Ruslan! The sound  
Of his dear voice. He’s there, in person:  
His face, his form; but dull of eye  
And pale is he, he bleeds, his thigh  
Is gashed: a wound, a bad one. “Mercy!  
Ruslan, ’tis you!” And with a cry  
She flies to him, and, heartsore, shaking,  
In tears, says to him, her voice breaking:  
“Ruslan, my husband, you are here  
And wounded, bleeding.... Oh, my dear!”  
Her arms go round him.... God in Heaven!  
What horror’s this! She cannot stir,  
She’s trapped, a net enmeshes her!...  
The cap falls off. Who is her craven  
And foul pursuer? Cold of limb,  
She hears: “She’s mine!” Her gaze grows dim....  
The dwarf, none other! Quite defenseless  
Is she again; she sees his face  
And moans, but by the good Lord’s grace  
Dreams now enfold her, she falls senseless.

Poor child! What sight is there more chilling,  
More certain to provoke our rage!  
His brazen hand the puny mage  
Lays on the charms of young Ludmila.  
Is he—foul thought!—to taste of bliss?  
But hark! A horn sounds. What means this?  
A challenge to him? Yes! The midget’s  
Face shows cold fear. He quails, he fidgets....  
A louder blare! Back on her head  
The magic cap he puts, and, paling,  
Is off, his beard behind him trailing,  
To meet the fate that lies ahead.





## CANTO THE FIFTH

How dear my princess is, one bows  
'Fore her, to sing her praises anxious:  
She is so tender, unpretentious,  
So faithful to her marriage vows;  
Capricious, yes, but not unduly,  
Which makes her only sweeter, truly.  
Her ways delight us, they endear  
Her to us, leaving us enchanted.  
How to compare her with Delphire  
Who's so unfeeling, so flint-hearted!  
By fate endowed has been the first  
With mien and manner most beguiling;  
To hear her speak, to see her smiling  
Makes one's heart throb, with love athirst.  
Delphire now, spurs and whiskers added,  
Would make a true Hussar. But stay!  
Blest is he who at end of day  
Has a Ludmila waiting for him  
In some lone nook, and from her hears  
That he's her love, that she adores him.  
And likewise blest is a Delphire's  
Admirer who is too clear-headed  
To court her long and runs away.  
But let's not stray too far. Come, say,  
Who was it that the dwarf invited

So daringly to fight him? Who  
Defiantly the trumpet blew  
And by its sound the villain frightened?—  
Ruslan. Afire with vengeance, he  
Has reached the midget's castle. See?  
Beneath the palisades he's halted;  
The trumpet's sound comes storm-like, loud,  
The steed paws at the snowy ground;  
The prince awaits the dwarf. A bolt of  
What seems like thunder deafens him.  
A crushing blow! It has descended  
Upon his helmet. Though defended  
By this his head is, yet with dim,  
Dull sight it is he upward gazes  
And sees the dwarf above him fly,  
A mammoth bludgeon lifted high.  
Ruslan bends down, his great shield raises  
And waves his sword, but Chernomor  
Sweeps upward; then, appearing o'er  
The prince again and downward swooping,  
He flies straight at him, whereupon  
The latter feints, his rival duping,  
And down the midget falls, straight on  
The well-packed snow, with fear nigh frozen.  
Ruslan dismounts, and, never pausing,  
The space between them neatly cleared,  
Grabs the magician by the beard!  
The captive grunts and strains, and, heaving  
Himself from off the bank of snow,  
Sails skyward with our hero, leaving  
The knight's astonished steed below.  
They're 'neath the clouds, Ruslan still gripping  
The beard and swinging in the air.  
O'er seas and forests, o'er the bare  
And rugged hills, their summits tipping,  
The dwarf wings, and the stalwart knight,  
Though numb and stiff his hand is growing,  
Holds dogged on. The dwarf is quite  
Used up by now and winded. Slowing  
His progress through the air at length,  
Amazed and awed by Russian strength,  
He turns to our young knight and slyly  
Says to him: "Prince, I'll do you ill









No more; in faith, I value highly  
Young valour such as yours and will  
Descend at once—on one condition....”  
“Be silent, dastardly magician!”  
Ruslan exclaims. “I will not treat  
With my beloved bride’s tormentor,  
Nor into any dealings enter  
With you! This sword—’tis only meet—  
Will punish you, and this most surely,  
All of your wiles will serve you poorly!  
Fly to the stars, if you so choose,  
And still your whiskers you will lose!”  
A horrid fear the wizard seizes,  
In vain to free himself he tries,  
The prince’s grip is like a vise,  
He tweaks the beard, and, gleeful, teases  
The dwarf by plucking out the hairs.  
For two whole days the midget bears  
Ruslan, but on the third, a’quiver  
With fright, he cries: “Have mercy, pray!  
I’ve no breath left at all. Deliver  
Me from this plight without delay.  
I’m in your hands. Where’er you say  
We will alight.” “Aha, you shiver!  
Well, then, admit you’re overcome  
By Russian strength! And, villain, come,  
To my Ludmila quickly take me!”

What is old Chernomor to do?  
Obedience is his rival’s due!  
And so he’s off, quite ill and shaken,  
And flying home. Midst hills of ice  
He sets the prince down. In a trice  
Ruslan the Head’s sword raises briskly  
With one strong hand; then, ’thout delay,  
The other using, grasps the whiskers  
And cuts them off like so much hay.  
“There now,” he tells him, “that will teach you!  
Where is that handsome tuft you prize,  
Your strength and pride, you thieving creature?”  
And to his helm the dwarf’s beard ties.  
He calls his bay who joins him, neighing,  
Into a bag the pasty-faced .



And half-dead wizard stuffs in haste,  
The dancing steed no longer staying,  
And starts uphill. The top. They ride  
Up to the massive palace portal.  
Ruslan—there is no happier mortal—  
In hot impatience steps inside.  
The throng of Moors and slave girls, seeing  
His helm with beard graced, know the knight  
To be the victor and are fleeing  
Before him, fading out of sight  
Like ghosts. Ruslan from hall to hall  
Strides all alone; we hear him call  
To his young spouse—the echo answers....  
Is she not in the necromancer's  
Great castle, then? The garden door  
He opens wide, all expectation,  
And on walks fast. His eye sweeps o'er  
The empty grounds in agitation:  
All's dead, naught stirs, still are the groves,  
The leafy arbours and the coves;  
The river banks, the slopes—deserted,  
The valleys too.... He's disconcerted,  
For nowhere e'en a trace is there  
Of her he seeks, nor can he hear  
The slightest sound. There passes through him  
A sudden chill, the world grows dark  
About him, and bleak thoughts come to him:  
"Captivity.... of grief the mark....  
A moment, and the waves—" These fancies,  
How dismal they! His head hung, he  
Stands like a rock there movelessly....  
His very reason clouds, his senses  
Fail him. He's all ablaze, he flames;  
Despairing love's dark poison surges,  
A mighty torrent, in his veins.  
Is't not his lady who emerges  
From darkness, is't not she who clings  
To him?... He roars her name, he flings  
Himself about, and, frenzied, raving,  
His sword in mad abandon waving,  
At boulders strikes and makes them roll  
Downhill, and hacking, mowing, slashing,  
Pavilions to the ground sends crashing,

Reduces grove and lea and knoll  
To barren wastes, and tumbles bridges  
Into the streams. The distant ridges  
Send back the clang, the boom, the din;  
Ruslan's sword sings and whistles. Grim  
The scene is: all is devastation;  
Insensed and maddened, our young knight  
A victim seeks; on left and right  
His sword the air cuts 'thout cessation....  
Then all at once a chance thrust sends  
The midget's magic headdress flying  
From off his captive's brow; so ends  
The spell cast on her. 'Fore him lying,  
Enmeshed, Ruslan Ludmila sees.  
He does not trust his eyes, he is  
O'ercome by happiness, and, falling  
At his bride's feet, tears up the nets,  
And with his tears her limp hands wets,  
And kisses them, her dear name calling.  
But closed her lips are and her eyes,  
And sensuous are the dreams she's seeing  
That make her bosom sink and rise.  
Fresh sorrow fills our knight's whole being;  
What means this sleep? Is she perchance  
To be forever in a trance?...  
But hark!—a friend's voice.... 'Tis the Finn,  
His councillor, who speaks to him:

“Take heart, O Prince! Upon your way  
For home set off with fair Ludmila  
And, strength of purpose your heart filling,  
To love and honour faithful stay.  
God's bolt will strike, defeating malice;  
You shall know peace, all will be well.  
In Kiev, in Vladimir's palace,  
Your bride will wake, free of her spell.”

Ruslan, much cheered, no longer weary,  
Lifts up his calmly sleeping bride,  
And down a slope we see him guide  
His horse and leave the mountain eyrie.

The midget to his saddle tied,  
Across a vale, across a forest



He hurries, by no rival harassed.  
In his arms his love rests, a precious  
And welcome burden. Oh, how fresh is  
Her face! The vernal dawn can be  
No more so. 'Gainst her husband's shoulder  
It rests, all sweet serenity....  
The wind born in the barrens boldly  
Plucks at her silky golden hair.  
She sighs, the roses on her fair  
Young cheeks play. Her beloved's name  
She whispers; 'tis her dreams that bring her  
His image and her heart inflame;  
On her lips love's avowals linger.  
And he—he's all fond contemplation  
(The sight of her his spirit cheers) —  
Oh, that sweet smile, those glistening tears,  
That lovely bosom's agitation!...

Meanwhile, by day, by night they journey  
Up hill, down dale, but still unspanned  
The distance is, still far the land  
Which to behold Ruslan is yearning.  
The maid sleeps on.... Did our young knight,  
By fruitless, unassuaged desire  
Worn—for it seems like years—not tire  
Of guarding her? Did he delight  
In virtuous dreams, immodest longing  
Subduing and in no way wronging  
His drowsy charge? So told are we  
By one, a monk, who put in writing  
The story of the prince, inviting  
Inquisitive posterity  
To profit by't. And I—I fully  
Believe the annalist, for, truly,  
What's love unshared?—An irksome thing  
That can but little pleasure bring.  
Ludmila's sleep did not resemble  
Yours in the least, nymphs of the mead,  
When languid springtime's call you heed  
And in the cooling shade assemble  
Of leafy trees.... I well recall  
That happy day in early summer,  
A tiny glade at evenfall,



And lovely Lida feigning slumber....  
That kiss of mine, so light, so shy,  
So hurried, young love's fresh, sweet token,  
Could not awake the maid; unbroken  
It left her sleep.... But, reader, why  
Do I talk nonsense? Why this needless  
Remembrance of a love long dead?  
Forgot its joys, its pain, its heedless  
And trying ways. To speak I'm led  
Of those not long from my thoughts gone:  
Ludmila, Chernomor, Ruslan.

A vale before them spreads; upon it  
Rise clumps of spruces, and a mound  
Looms farther out, its strangely round  
And very dark and gloomy summit  
Against the bright blue sky outlined.  
Our youthful knight at once divined  
That 'twas the Head before them showing;  
The steed speeds on, more restive growing;  
Across the plain its great hooves thunder....  
And lo!—they're close, they're nearly there;  
Before them is the nine days' wonder,  
It fixes them with glassy stare.  
It is a thing repulsive, horrid:  
Its inky hair falls on its forehead;  
Drenched of all life, the hue of lead  
Its face is, while the huge lips, parted,  
And, like the cheeks, of colour bled,  
Disclose clenched teeth; over the Head  
Its hour of doom hangs. Our brave-hearted  
And doughty knight rides up and faces  
Its sightless gaze; the midget graces  
The horse's rump. "Hail, Head!" Ruslan  
Cries loudly, for the Head to hear him.  
"He who betrayed you is undone!  
Look! Here he is, none now need fear him!"  
These words the Head revived  
And in it roused new, fresh-born feeling.  
It looked down at them, and, revealing  
All of its anguish, moaned and sighed.  
Our hero it had recognized,  
And at the midget, nostrils swelling,



Stared, full of venom undisguised.  
A fiery red its pale cheeks turned,  
And in its death-glazed eyes there burned  
A fury fierce and all-compelling.  
In towering rage, incensed, confused,  
It gnashed its giant teeth, and stuttered,  
And smothered imprecations muttered,  
And with its slowing tongue abused  
Its hated brother.... But the pain,  
Prolonged as it had been, was ceasing;  
The dark, flushed face turned pale again,  
And weaker grew the heavy breathing.  
Its eyes rolled back, and soon Ruslan  
And magus knew that all was over:  
A spasm, and the Head was gone.  
The knight rode off at once, much sobered;  
As for the dwarf, he did not dare  
To breathe, and, all his past strength losing,  
To fiends in hell addressed a prayer,  
The language of black magic using.

Where a small nameless streamlet wound,  
Upon the sloping bank above it,  
By dark and shaded forest covered,  
There stood, nigh sunk into the ground,  
A run-down hut. Thick pine-trees shaded  
Its roof. The waters, somnolent,  
Licked lazily at a much faded  
And worn-down fence of reeds and went  
With gentle murmur round it snaking;  
The breeze blew softly, only making  
A faint sound.... There it was that spread  
A vale, and such was its seclusion,  
It gave one the distinct illusion  
That an unbroken silence had  
Here from the birth of Time been reigning.  
Ruslan now stopped his horse. The waning  
And peaceful night to morn gave way;  
The grove and valley sparkling lay  
'Neath veils of haze. His sleeping bride  
The prince laid on the grass, and, seating  
Himself beside her, close, he sighed  
And looked at her, his young heart beating

With dulcet hope. Just then a boat's  
White sail he glimpses, and there floats  
A fisher's song above the water  
That drowns its gentler voice and softer.  
The man has cast his nets, and, bending  
With zeal and promptness to the oar,  
His humble vessel now is sending  
Straight for the hut perched on the shore.  
The good prince shades his eyes and watches:  
There now—the boat the green bank touches,  
And from the hut there hurries out  
A sweet young maid; her hair about  
Her shoulders loosely falls, she's slender  
And bare of breast, her smile is tender,  
She's charm itself. The two embrace  
And on the bank sit, taking pleasure  
In one another, in this place,  
And in a quiet hour of leisure.  
But whom to his intense surprise  
Does Prince Ruslan now recognize  
In this young fisherman? Dear Heaven!  
It is Ratmir! Yes, it is he,  
A man for exploit born, and even  
For fame itself, one of his three  
Sworn rivals. On this halcyon shore  
He turned to fair Ludmila faithless,  
And for his new love's warm embraces  
Relinquished fame for ever more.

Ruslan came up to him, astounded;  
The recluse khan his rival knew.  
A cry, and to the prince he flew  
And joyous threw his arms around him.  
"You here, Ratmir? Lay you no claim  
To greater things?" our hero asked him.  
"Have you found life like ours too tasking  
Thus to reject your knightly fame?"  
"In truth, Ruslan," replied the khan,  
"War and its phantom glory bore me;  
Behind me have I left my stormy,  
Tumultuous years. This peace, this calm,  
And love, and pastimes innocent  
Bring me a hundred-fold more gladness.





My lust for combat being spent,  
No tribute do I pay to madness;  
Rich am I, friend, in happiness,  
And have all else forgot, yes, even  
Ludmila's charms." "I'm glad, God bless  
You for't, Ratmir, for fate has given  
Her back to me...." "You have your bride  
With you!" amazed, the young khan cried.  
"What luck! I too once longed to free her....  
Where is she, then? I'd like to see her—  
But no! I'll not betray my mate;  
Made mine by a forgiving fate,  
She wrought this change in me, the fervour  
Of eager youth in me revived;  
Because I'm hers, because I serve her  
I know true love and am alive.  
Twelve sirens who professed a longing  
For me without regret I spurned;  
My heart to none of them belonging,  
I left them never to return;  
I left their merry home, a castle  
That in a shaded forest nestled,  
My sword and helm laid down, and foe  
And fame forgot. 'Twas, my friend, so  
That, peace and solitude embracing,  
A kithless hermit I became,  
And dwell, to no one known by name,  
With her I love...."

Upon him gazing,  
The shepherdess ne'er left his side;  
Now smiled she sweetly, now she sighed....  
On, on, unseen, the hours went racing.

Their hearts by friendship warmed, till night  
Set in, o'er all its patterns tracing,  
The fisher sat beside the knight....  
It's still and dark. The half-moon's light,  
Pale just at first, is brighter growing.  
Time to be off! A cover throwing  
With gentle hand o'er his young bride,  
Ruslan goes off to mount his steed.  
The khan, bemused, preoccupied,

In spirit follows him; indeed,  
Good luck in all his daring ventures  
He wishes him and happiness  
And his proud dreams and past adventures  
Recalls with fleeting wistfulness....

Why is it Fortune has not granted  
My fickle Lyre the right to praise  
Heroic deeds alone? Why can't I  
Of love and friendship, that these days  
Are out of fashion, chant? A bard  
Of Truth, why must I (God, it's hard!)  
Denounce spite, venom, vice, am fated  
In my sincere and artless songs  
To bare for those to come the wrongs  
By crafty demons perpetrated?

Farlaf, Ludmila's worthless wooer,  
A wretch, still eager to pursue her,  
But all his dreams of glory gone,  
Out in the wilds lived, isolated  
From all mankind and known to none,  
And for Nahina's coming waited.  
Nor did he, reader, wait in vain:  
For here she is, the ancient dame!  
A solemn hour. "You know me, stalwart,"  
She says to him. "Now mount, and forward!  
Come after me." And lo!—with that  
She turns herself into a cat,  
And then, the charger saddled, races  
Off and away. She's followed by  
Farlaf on horseback. Through the mazes  
Of gloomy forests their paths lie.

Clad in night's haze that never lifted,  
The vale lay tranquil, slumber-bound,  
And, veiled in mist, the pale moon drifted  
From cloud to cloud and lit the mound  
With fitful rays. Beneath it seated,  
Our hero, staying at her side,  
Kept vigil o'er his sleeping bride.  
By tristful thought all but defeated  
The poor prince was; within him crowded  
Dreams, fancies and imaginings;





Beginning gently to enshroud him,  
Above him hovered sleep's cool wings.  
His closing eyes upon the sweet  
Young maid he tried to fix, but, feeling  
Unable this to do, sank, reeling,  
By slumber captured, at her feet.

A dream comes to him, bodeful, gloomy:  
He seems to see Ludmila, his  
Sweet princess, pale-faced and unmoving,  
Pause on the brink of an abyss.  
She vanishes, and he is standing  
Above the dreaded chasm alone,  
And from it comes, the spirit rending,  
A call for help, a piteous moan....  
'Tis she! He jumps, and flies apace,  
To pierce the darkness vainly straining.  
Through fathomless, night-mantled space,  
And then, at long last bottom gaining,  
Steps on hard ground.... Vladimir's palace  
Before him towers.... He enters. There is  
The old Prince with his grey-haired knights,  
His twelve young sons, his guests, all seated  
At festive tables. No smile lights  
Vladimir's face. He does not greet him  
And seems as wroth as on the dread  
And well-remembered day of parting.  
All silent stay, no banter starting,  
No talk. But there—is not the dead  
Rogdai among them, his past rival,  
The one that he in battle slew?  
Quite unaware of his arrival,  
A froth-topped goblet of some brew  
He gaily drains. Surprised, Ruslan  
Espies Ratmir, the youthful khan,  
And others, friends and foes, ringed near him;  
The gusli tinkle, old Bayan  
Of deeds heroic chants—to hear him  
Is strange. Farlaf now enters, leading  
Ludmila in. The Prince, receding  
Into himself, his grey head bowed,  
Says not a word. The silent crowd  
Of boyars, princes, knights, concealing



What so disquiets, so dismays  
And frightens them, quite moveless stays.  
Then, in an instant, all is gone....  
A deathly chill o'er his heart stealing,  
Ruslan now finds himself alone.  
From his eyes tortured tears are flowing,  
Sleep fetters him, he tries to break  
Its leaden chains, but fails, and, knowing  
'Tis but a dream, cannot awake.  
Above the hill the moon looms pale;  
Dark are the forests; in the vale  
Dead silence reigns, and there, astride  
His steed, we see the traitor ride.  
A glade and barrow he has sighted;  
Stretched at his love's feet, on the ground  
Ruslan sleeps, and around the mound  
His stallion walks. Farlaf, much frightened,  
Looks on a'tremble. In the mist  
The witch is lost. No signal sounding,  
The bridle dropping from his fist,  
He rides up closer, his heart pounding,  
And leans across, his broadsword bared,  
To cleave the knight in two prepared  
Without a fight. His presence scenting,  
The stallion whinnies angrily  
And paws the ground. But what's to be,  
There is, I fear me, no preventing!  
Ruslan hears nothing, for sleep on him  
Weighs heavily, a cruel vise.  
Spurred by the witch, Farlaf's upon him,  
And plunging deep his sharp steel thrice  
Into his breast, his priceless prey  
Lifts up and, weak-kneed, rides away.  
The hours flew. Beneath the barrow  
The whole night long our hero lay;  
The blood from his wounds oozed in narrow,  
Unending streamlets.... Dawn arrived,  
And with its coming he revived,  
Let out a heavy, muffled groan,  
About him peered, and, vainly trying  
To lift himself and stand, fell prone,  
Like one already dead—or dying.





## CANTO THE SIXTH

You bid me, O my heart's desire,  
Take up my light and carefree lyre  
And chant the lays of old, my leisure  
Devoting to a faithful Muse.  
Do you not know, then, that I treasure  
Love's raptures more and frankly choose  
To spend but little of my time  
With that long cherished lyre of mine,  
That being now at odds with rumour  
And drunk with bliss, I'm in no humour  
To welcome toil or harmony's  
Sweet, winsome strains.... By you I breathe,  
And though loud are fame's prideful speeches,  
Their sound my ear but faintly reaches.  
Of genius the secret fires  
Are dead; its thoughts are left behind.  
Love, love alone my heart inspires,  
Its wild desires invade my mind.  
But you—you'd have me sing; my stories  
Of loves long past and erstwhile glories  
Appeal to you; you wish to hear  
Of Prince Ruslan and of Ludmila,  
The dwarf, Nahina, Vladimir,

And to the old Finn's woes a willing  
And patient ear are glad to lend.  
The tales I spun would sometimes tend  
To make you feel a trifle sleepy  
Though with a smile you listened e'er.  
At other times I was aware  
How tenderly—this felt I deeply—  
Your loving gaze the singer's met.  
Enamored babbler, I will let  
My fingers pass over the lazy  
And stubborn strings, and at your feet,  
The minstrel's customary seat,  
Strum loudly, my young champion praising.

But where's Ruslan? Out in the field,  
His blood long cold and long congealed,  
He sprawls, a raven o'er him swooping,  
Upon the grass lie limp and drooping  
The whiskers serving to adorn  
His helm of steel; mute is his horn.

His golden mane no longer waving,  
Around the prince his mount walks gravely,  
Head lowered; in his once bright eye  
The light has died. Not knowing why  
The prince lies so, he is unwilling  
To play and waits for him to wake.  
In vain! The prince won't move or take  
The sword up: deep his sleep and chilling.

And Chernomor? There, in the bag,  
He lies, forgotten by the hag,  
And knowing naught, his grudges nurses;  
Worn, sleepy, bored to tears, he curses  
My youthful hero and his bride....  
Then, not a sound his ears assailing  
For hours on end, he peeps outside—  
A miracle, no less! Words fail him.  
For in a pool of blood the knight  
Lies dead, and no one is in sight;  
Ludmila's gone, the field's deserted.  
The wizard crows in joy. "I'm free!"  
He cries. "All danger is averted."  
But he is wrong, as we shall see.





Farlaf, by old Nahina aided,  
On horseback makes for Kiev; he  
Is full of hope and fear. The maiden  
Across the saddle lies asleep.  
Ahead, the Dnieper, cold and deep,  
Already shows, its waters flowing  
Mid native leas; the city's glowing  
Gold domes and wooden walls draw near.  
Here is the gate! The townsfolk cheer,  
And mill about, excitement mounting.  
Word to the Prince is sent. Before  
The eyes of all, at palace door  
We see the knavish youth dismounting.

Meanwhile, Vladimir, called Bright Sun,  
 Was in his lofty terem sitting,  
 And, filled with sorrow unremitting,  
 On his loss brooding. Round him, glum,  
 His knights and boyars sat, a pompous,  
 Stone-visaged lot. A sudden rumpus  
 Is heard without: yells, shouts, a din;  
 The portal opes. A knight comes in.  
 Who can he be? Why the intrusion?  
 All rise. A murmur fills the room,  
 Grows louder. General confusion.  
 Ludmila rescued! And by whom!—  
 Farlaf, of all men! Strange! The Prince,  
 Changed wholly now of countenance,  
 Starts from his chair and, heavy-footed,  
 Hastes to his long-lost daughter's side.  
 He touches her; she stirs not; muted  
 Her breathing is. Ruslan's young bride  
 Rests in the killer's arms unfeeling,  
 The hands of magic her lips sealing,  
 Its powers holding her spellbound.  
 His men the aged Prince watch dully  
 As, anxious-eyed and melancholy,  
 Farlaf he queries, though no sound  
 Escapes him. "Aye, the maiden sleeps,"  
 A finger holding to his lips,  
 Without a qualm, Farlaf says slyly.  
 "I found her, Prince, held by a wily  
 And wicked goblin captive in  
 A Murom forest. Bound to win  
 Was valour, and it did. We battled  
 For three long days. Above us two  
 The moon rose thrice; then all was settled:  
 He fell. The sleeping maid to you  
 I rushed to bring from that forsaken  
 And lonely spot. When she's to waken  
 And with whose help is only known  
 To fate, whose ways are dark. Alone  
 Hope, yes, and patient meditation  
 Can offer us some consolation."

Throughout the town there flew ere long  
 The fateful news, all hearts distressing.







The square filled with a seething throng  
Of townsfolk, toward the palace pressing.  
A house of grief, it opes its doors  
To all, and there the crowd now pours  
To see the youthful princess sleeping  
On a raised couch clothed in brocade,  
The knights and princes o'er the maid  
With sombre faces vigil keeping.  
Horns, tympan, gusli, tambourines  
And trumpets sound. The Prince, grief-worn,  
His grey head 'gainst his child's feet leans  
With silent tears. Beside him, torn  
By mute remorse, dismay, self-pity,  
Farlaf stands trembling, white of face,  
His brashness gone without a trace.

Soon darkness fell, but in the city  
None closed an eye, and all throughout

The night discussed, grouped near their houses,  
 How it could all have come about,  
 Some husbands lingering without  
 And quite forgetting their young spouses.  
 But when the twin-horned moon on high  
 Met dawn, its bright rays slowly paling,  
 There rose throughout a hue and cry,  
 A din, a clang of arms, a wailing.  
 A new alarm! And, shaken, all  
 Come scrambling up the city wall.  
 A mist the river cloaks. Beyond it  
 They see white tents, the glint of shields,  
 Dust raised by horsemen in the fields,  
 And moving carts: they are surrounded;  
 Up on the hilltops campfires flame....  
 To such scenes Kiev is no stranger;  
 It's clear the city is in danger,  
 The Pechenegs attack again!



While this went on, the Finn, a seer  
 And ruler of the spirits, waited,  
 Withdrawn from all the world, to hear  
 Of happenings anticipated,  
 Foreseen by him.... Calm, tranquil he:  
 What is ordained is bound to be.

Deep in the steppe, sun-parched and soundless,  
 Beyond a chain of hills, the boundless  
 Realm of wild gales and windstorms, where  
 The aweless witch will scarcely dare  
 To walk with the approach of evening,  
 A vale lies hid that boasts two springs:  
 One leaps o'er stones and plays and sings,  
 For it is rich in water *living*;  
 The other o'er the valley bed  
 Flows sluggishly, its waters *dead*.  
 All's silence here, no breezes blowing  
 That coolness bring; no busy bird  
 To chatter or to sing is heard;  
 No age-old pines on sand dunes growing  
 Are seen to stir; no fawn, no deer  
 Drinks of these waters. It is here  
 On guard two spirits have been standing



Since Time began, the fear commanding  
Of all. Before them now the Finn  
Appears, two jugs, both empty, bearing;  
Their trance is broken, and from him  
They flee, to other parts repairing.  
He fills the vessels with the pure,  
Sweet water 'fore him softly streaming,  
And then is off, to vanish seeming  
Into thin air. A second or  
Two seconds pass, and in the vale  
Where, motionless and deathly pale,  
Ruslan lies, he now stands. First he  
Dead water o'er the knight sprays, causing  
The gaping wounds to heal and rosy  
The grey lips turning suddenly;  
With living water then he sprays  
The comely but still lifeless face—  
And death is vanquished, gone its rigor;  
Ruslan, full of fresh strength and vigour,  
Stands up; life courses in his veins,  
The past a ghastly dream remains  
Behind him, dim.... O'erjoyed, he faces  
The rising day that 'fore him blazes.  
But he's alone.... Where's his young bride?...  
Of fear a tremor passes through him;  
Then his heart leaps, for at his side  
He sees the Finn who now says to him:  
"It's as Fate wills. Bliss is in store  
For you, my son, but not before  
A bloody feast you'll have attended  
And with your sword put down the foe.  
You'll see your bride and gladness know,  
Once peace on Kiev has descended.  
Here is a ring for you. Her brow  
Touch with it, and from sleep she'll waken.  
The very sight of you, I vow,  
Will leave your foes confused and shaken  
And put the lot of them to flight.  
Then will maliciousness and spite,  
My friend, and all things evil perish.  
Be worthy of your love and cherish  
Your bride, Ruslan.... And now goodbye....  
Beyond the grave will you and I

Meet, not before." With this he vanished,  
And Prince Ruslan, all his fears banished,  
O'erjoyed to be to life restored,  
Stands with his arms stretched out toward  
His friend.... Alas! The grassy lea is  
Deserted quite save for the bay  
(The dwarf's still in the bag) who whinnies  
And rears and shakes his mane. Away  
The prince now makes to go, and, springing  
Into the saddle, grips the reins.  
He's hale and sound. Across the plains  
And woods we see him boldly winging.

And what of Kiev, by the foe  
Beleaguered?... There, filled with suspense,  
High on its walls and battlements,  
The townsfolk crowd. The fields below  
Surveying fearfully, they wait  
God's smiting hand, the hand of fate.  
Subdued laments come from the houses;  
No sound the fear-hushed byways rouses.  
Beside his child in earnest prayer  
Vladimir kneels, plunged deep in sorrow.  
His knights and noblemen and their  
Great warrior-host for war prepare:  
The bloody fray's set for the morrow!

Dawn broke, and down the hills the foes  
Poured, armed with swords and spears and bows;  
They surged relentless, never slowing,  
Wave upon wave across the plains  
And toward the city walls came flowing.  
The Kiev trumpets started blowing,  
And out its men rushed, with the chains  
Of the attackers boldly clashing.  
The fray begins! In sudden fear,  
As death they scent, steeds neigh and rear;  
The riders, forward headlong dashing,  
In battle meet, their steel swords flashing.  
Sent forth in clouds, the arrows hum;  
The fields turn red: with blood they run.  
A man who's lost his war-horse faces  
A horseman: which of them will smite



The other first? In wild-eyed fright  
Across the field a charger races.  
Death. Cries for help and battle-calls.  
A Pecheneg, a Russian falls.  
One's by an arrow pierced swift-flying;  
Another's maced, his groan unheard;  
A foeman's shield has crushed a third,  
And, trampled on, he lies there, dying.  
The fray went on till dark set in,  
But neither warring side could win....  
The slain in mounds lay; blood flowed freely;  
Sleep claimed the living, all concealing  
From their sight. Through the fearful night's  
Long hours the wounded moaned in pain,  
And one could hear the Russian knights  
To their God pray and speak His name.

But paler turned the shade of morn,  
And in the swiftly-flowing river  
The rippling waves seemed made of silver:  
Day, thickly cloaked in mist, was born.  
The hills and forests slowly brightened;  
The skies, by sun their blueness heightened,  
Broke free of sleep.... Yet moveless still  
The battlefield remained until  
The hostile camp awoke abruptly,  
A challenge followed the alarm,  
And warfare once again erupting,  
Old Kiev lost its short-lived calm.  
All rush to watch the scene below  
And see a knight in flaming mail  
Through ranks of foemen blaze a trail,  
See him descend on them and mow  
Them boldly down—see his sword flash  
And thrust and stab and cut and slash....  
It was Ruslan. The dwarf behind him,  
His horn triumphantly he blows  
And like a thunderbolt the foes  
Strikes down; where'er it is we find him  
Borne by his steed, the infidels  
Row upon row he vengeful fells,  
And awing the enthralled beholders,  
With whistling sword parts heads from shoulders....







Where'er he passes, bodies strew  
The battleground, crushed, headless, dying,  
With spears and arrows near them lying  
And heaps of armour. Then, anew  
The trumpet's battle call remorseless  
Sounds, and behold!—the Slavic forces  
To join Ruslan on horseback fly.  
A fierce fray follows.... Pagan, die!  
The Pechenegs, those savage raiders,  
Round up their scattered horses and  
In panic flee. The feared invaders  
Of Russ, they can no more withstand  
The Slavs' attack; their wild yells carry  
Over the dusty field; their hordes,  
Cut down by Kiev's smiting swords,  
The fires of the inferno face....  
Kiev exults.... And now our daring  
Young prince—his horse he sits with grace—  
On through its gate rides, proudly bearing  
His sword of victory; his lance  
Shines star-like, drawing every glance;  
The blood is seen to trickle down  
His heavy mail of bronze, he's wearing  
A helm whose top the whiskers crown  
Of Chernomor. And all about him  
There's noise and gaiety and shouting.  
The very air with his name rings....  
Toward the Prince's house on wings  
Of hope he flies, and goes inside.  
Here now's the silent chamber where  
Sleeps fair Ludmila; at her side  
Her father stands, deep lines of care  
Etched on his face. There's no one near him,  
No friend to comfort or to cheer him,  
For they have all gone off to war....  
Farlaf, alone the call of duty  
Denying, at the chamber door  
Kept vigil; in him deeply rooted  
Was an aversion for things martial,  
To calm and comfort he was partial,  
And very much so. Seeing who  
Was there before him, he surrendered  
To fear; his blood froze; speechless rendered,



On to his knees he fell.... He knew  
That retribution was his due,  
That he was doomed. Ruslan, however,  
The magic ring just then recalled  
And, faithful to his love as ever,  
Her pale brow touched with it. Behold!—  
She oped her eyes and sighed in wonder:  
Night had been long, too long.... It seemed  
That she was still entranced, still under  
The spell of something she had dreamed.  
And then her vision cleared—she knew him!  
And fell into his arms, and to him  
Clung lovingly. By joy made numb,  
He saw naught, heard naught, his heart raced....  
And Prince Vladimir, overcome,  
Wept as his dear ones he embraced.

You will have guessed, and without fail,  
How ends my all too drawn-out tale.  
Flown was Vladimir's wrath ungrounded;



Farlaf confessed his guilt; Ruslan,  
So happy was he, in him found it  
All to forgive; the dwarf, undone,  
His powers lost, was added to  
Vladimir-Bright Sun's retinue;  
To mark an end to tribulation  
A sumptuous feast of celebration  
The Prince held in his chamber high,  
By friends and family surrounded.

The ways and deeds of days gone by,  
A narrative on legend founded.

## EPILOGUE

Thus, the world's mindless dweller, spending  
Life's precious hours in idle peace,  
Its strings my lyre to me lending,  
I sang the lore of bygone days.  
I sang, the painful blows forgetting  
Of fate that blindly o'er us rules,  
The wiles of frivolous maids, the petty  
And thoughtless jibes of prating fools.  
My mind, on wings of fancy soaring,  
To parts ethereal was borne,  
While all unknown there gathered o'er me  
The dark clouds of a mighty storm....  
And I was lost.... But you who always  
Watched o'er me in my earlier years,  
You, blessed friendship, giving solace  
To one whose heart deep sorrow sears!—  
You calmed the raging storm, and, heeding  
My spirit's call, brought peace to me;  
You saved me—saved my treasured freedom,  
Of fiery youth the deity!  
Far from the social whirl, the Neva  
Behind me left, forgotten even  
By rumour, here am I where loom  
Caucasian peaks in prideful gloom.  
Atop high steeps, mid downward tumbling  
Cascades and cataracts of stone,  
I stand and drink it all in dumbly,  
And revel, to reflection prone,  
In nature's dark and savage beauty;  
To wounding thought my soul's still wed,  
Within it sadness lives, deep-rooted,  
But the poetic fires are dead,



In vain I seek for inspiration:  
Gone is the blithe and happy time  
Of love, of merry dreams, of rhyme,  
Of all that filled me with elation.  
Sweet rapture's span has not been long,  
Flown from me has the Muse of song,  
Of softly spoken incantation....



### FROM THE PUBLISHERS

Written in 1820, when Pushkin was very young, *Ruslan and Ludmila* was his first major work. Its appearance signalled the birth of a genius who was soon to make all of Russia resound with his name. "The sun of Russian poetry", as the poet came later to be called, was rising.

A graduate of the Tsarskoselsky Lyceum, Pushkin, like his fellow students, had a good knowledge of the literature of classicism with its poetic evocation of a past rich in heroic deeds. In *Ruslan and Ludmila*, a poem written in a light and humorous vein and characterized by an easy grace and lucidity, Pushkin saw fit to present this heroic past in a facetious light and to parody the mumbo-jumbo of sorcery and mysticism.

Why the poem, when it was brought out, was met with such sharp controversy, can only be explained by its originality, its complete unorthodoxy. Having chosen for his theme the romantic story of four Russian knights who set out to rescue a princess captured by a wicked magician, the poet introduces a consciously "earthy" approach to it and is quick to ridicule his characters. Ruslan, whose young bride has been carried away from him, is likened to a rooster, "the sultan of the henhouse", Ludmila, to a flustered hen, her captor, Chernomor, to a kite, "a marauder of poultry-yards".

The poem is gay and festive and bubbles with life. The poet makes a confidant of his reader, invites him to join in the fun and to thrust away, as does he, the chains that shackle man's spirit.



## REQUEST TO READERS

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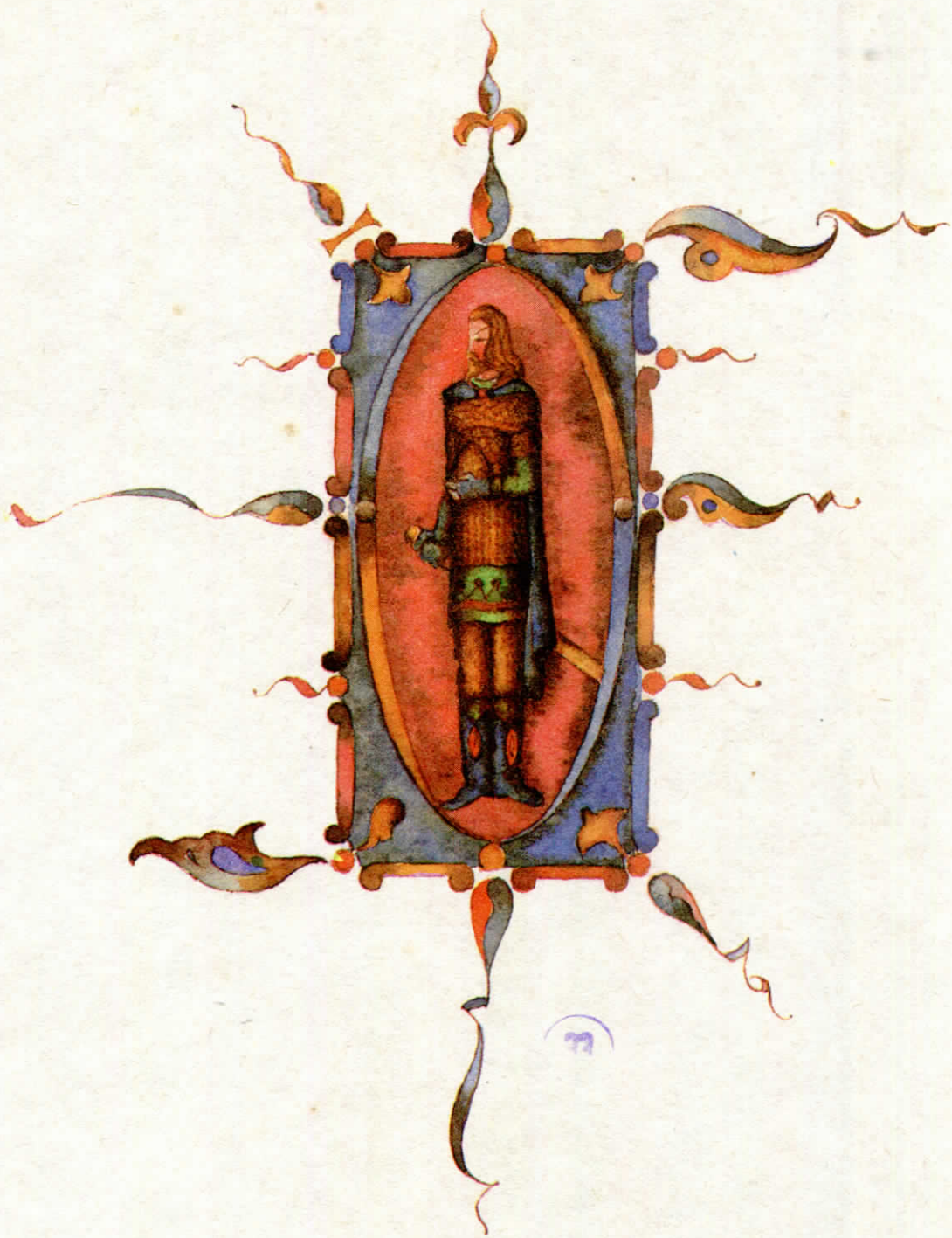
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